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THE LITTLE MINISTER.

THE

LITTLE MINISTER.

BY

J. M. BARRIE.

In Three Volumes.

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SAUVAGE

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

THE LOVE-LIGHT 1

CHAPTER II.

RUNS ALONGSIDE THE MAKING OF A MINISTER . . 12

CHAPTER III.

THE NIGHT-WATCHERS 31

CHAPTER IV.

FIRST COMING OF THE EGYPTIAN WOMAN . . . 55

CHAPTER V.

A WARLIKE CHAPTER, CULMINATING IN THE FLOUTING OF THE MINISTER BY THE WOMAN. 78

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE SOLDIERS MEET THE AMAZONS OF THRUMS 94

CHAPTER VII.

PAGE

Has the Folly of Looking into a Woman's Eyes by Way of Text 116

CHAPTER VIII.

3 A.M.—Monstrous Audacity of the Woman . . 129

CHAPTER IX.

The Woman considered in Absence.—Adventures of a Military Cloak 148

CHAPTER X.

First Sermon against Women 168

CHAPTER XI.

Tells in a Whisper of Man's Fall during the Curling Season 188

CHAPTER XII.

Tragedy of a Mud House 206

CHAPTER XIII.

Second Coming of the Egyptian Woman. . 218

THE

LITTLE MINISTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOVE-LIGHT.

Long ago in the days when our caged blackbirds never saw a king's soldier without whistling impudently, "Come ower the water to Charlie," a minister of Thrums was to be married, but something happened, and he remained a bachelor. Then, when he was old, he passed in our square the lady who was to have been his wife, and her hair was white, but she, too, was still unmarried. The meeting had only one witness, a weaver, and he said solemnly afterwards, "They didna speak, but they just gave one another a look, and I saw the love-light in their een." No more is remembered of these two, no

being now living ever saw them, but the poetry that was in the soul of a battered weaver makes them human to us for ever.

It is of another minister I am to tell, but only to those who know that light when they see it. I am not bidding good-bye to many readers, for though it is true that some men, of whom Lord Rintoul was one, live to an old age without knowing love, few of us can have met them, and of women so incomplete I never heard.

Gavin Dishart was barely twenty-one when he and his mother came to Thrums, light-hearted like the traveller who knows not what awaits him at the bend of the road. It was the time of year when the ground is carpeted beneath the firs with brown needles, when splitnuts patter all day from the beech, and children lay yellow corn on the dominie's desk to remind him that now they are needed in the fields. The day was so silent that carts could be heard rumbling a mile

away. All Thrums was out in its wynds and closes—a few of the weavers still in knee-breeches—to look at the new Auld Licht minister. I was there too, the dominie of Glen Quharity, which is four miles from Thrums; and heavy was my heart as I stood afar off so that Gavin's mother might not have the pain of seeing me. I was the only one in the crowd who looked at her more than at her son.

Eighteen years had passed since we parted. Already her hair had lost the brightness of its youth, and she seemed to me smaller and more fragile; and the face that I loved when I was a hobbledehoy, and loved when I looked once more upon it in Thrums, and always shall love till I die, was soft and worn. Margaret was an old woman, and she was only forty-three: and I am the man who made her old. As Gavin put his eager boyish face out at the carriage window, many saw that he was holding her hand, but none could be glad

at the sight as the dominie was glad, looking on at a happiness in which he dared not mingle. Margaret was crying because she was so proud of her boy. Women do that. Poor sons to be proud of, good mothers, but I would not have you dry those tears.

When the little minister looked out at the carriage window, many of the people drew back humbly, but a little boy in a red frock with black spots pressed forward and offered him a sticky parly, which Gavin accepted, though not without a tremor, for children were more terrible to him then than bearded men. The boy's mother, trying not to look elated, bore him away, but her face said that he was made for life. With this little incident Gavin's career in Thrums began. I remembered it suddenly the other day when wading across the wynd where it took place. Many scenes in the little minister's life come back to me in this way. The first time I ever thought of writing his love story as an

old man's gift to a little maid since grown tall, was one night while I sat alone in the school-house; on my knees a fiddle that has been my only living companion since I sold my hens. My mind had drifted back to the first time I saw Gavin and the Egyptian together, and what set it wandering to that midnight meeting was my garden gate shaking in the wind. At a gate on the hill I had first encountered these two. It rattled in his hand, and I looked up and saw them, and neither knew why I had such cause to start at the sight. Then the gate swung to It had just such a click as mine.

These two figures on the hill are more real to me than things that happened yesterday, but I do not know that I can make them live to others. A ghost-show used to come yearly to Thrums on the merry Muckle Friday, in which the illusion was contrived by hanging a glass between the onlookers and the stage. I cannot deny that the comings and goings

of the ghost were highly diverting, yet the farmer of T'nowhead only laughed because he had paid his money at the hole in the door like the rest of us. T'nowhead sat at the end of a form where he saw round the glass and so saw no ghost. I fear my public may be in the same predicament. I see the little minister as he was at one-and-twenty, and the little girl to whom this story is to belong sees him, though the things I have to tell happened before she came into the world. But there are reasons why she should see; and I do not know that I can provide the glass for others. If they see round it, they will neither laugh nor cry with Gavin and Babbie.

When Gavin came to Thrums he was as I am now, for the pages lay before him on which he was to write his life. Yet he was not quite as I am. The life of every man is a diary in which he means to write one story, and writes another; and his humblest hour is when he compares the volume as it is with

what he vowed to make it. But the biographer sees the last chapter while he is still at the first, and I have only to write over with ink what Gavin has written in pencil.

How often is it a phantom woman who draws the man from the way he meant to go? So was man created, to hunger for the ideal that is above himself, until one day there is magic in the air, and the eyes of a girl rest upon him. He does not know that it is he himself who crowned her, and if the girl is as pure as he, their love is the one form of idolatry that is not quite ignoble. It is the joining of two souls on their way to God. But if the woman be bad, the test of the man is when he wakens from his dream. The nobler his ideal, the further will he have been hurried down the wrong way, for those who only run after little things will not go far. His love may now sink into passion, perhaps only to stain its wings and rise again, perhaps to drown.

Babbie, what shall I say of you who make me write these things? I am not your judge. Shall we not laugh at the student who chafes when between him and his book comes the song of the thrushes, with whom, on the mad night you danced into Gavin's life, you had more in common than with Auld Licht ministers? The gladness of living was in your step, your voice was melody, and he was wondering what love might be. You were the daughter of a summer night, born where all the birds are free, and the moon christened you with her soft light to dazzle the eyes of man. Not our little minister alone was stricken by you into his second childhood. To look upon you was to rejoice that so fair a thing could be; to think of you is still to be young. Even those who called you a little devil, of whom I have been one, admitted that in the end you had a soul, though not that you had been born with one. They said you stole it,

and so made a woman of yourself. But again I say I am not your judge, and when I picture you as Gavin saw you first, a bare-legged witch dancing up Windyghoul, rowan berries in your black hair, and on your finger a jewel the little minister could not have bought with five years of toil, the shadows on my pages lift, and I cannot wonder that Gavin loved you.

Often I say to myself that this is to be Gavin's story, not mine. Yet must it be mine too, in a manner, and of myself I shall sometimes have to speak; not willingly, for it is time my little tragedy had died of old age. I have kept it to myself so long that now I would stand at its grave alone. It is true that when I heard who was to be the new minister I hoped for a day that the life broken in Harvie might be mended in Thrums, but two minutes' talk with Gavin showed me that Margaret had kept from him the secret which was hers and mine, and so knocked

the bottom out of my vain hopes. I did not blame her then, nor do I blame her now, nor shall anyone who blames her ever be called friend by me; but it was bitter to look at the white manse among the trees and know that I must never enter it. For Margaret's sake I had to keep aloof, yet this new trial came upon me like our parting at Harvie. I thought that in those eighteen years my passions had burned like a ship till they sank, but I suffered again as on that awful night when Adam Dishart came back, nearly killing Margaret and tearing up all my ambitions by the root in a single hour. I waited in Thrums until I had looked again on Margaret, who thought me dead, and Gavin who had never heard of me, and then I trudged back to the school-house. Something I heard of them from time to time during the winter—for in the gossip of Thrums I was well posted—but much of what is to be told here I only learned afterwards from those

who knew it best. Gavin heard of me at times as the dominie in the glen who had ceased to attend the Auld Licht kirk, and Margaret did not even hear of me. It was all I could do for them.

CHAPTER II.

RUNS ALONGSIDE THE MAKING OF A MINISTER.

On the east coast of Scotland, hidden, as if in a quarry, at the foot of cliffs that may one day fall forward, is a village called Harvie. So has it shrunk since the day when I skulked from it that I hear of a traveller's asking lately at one of its doors how far he was from a village; yet Harvie throve once and was celebrated even in distant Thrums for its fish. Most of our weavers would have thought it as unnatural not to buy harvies in the square on the Muckle Friday, as to let Saturday night pass without laying in a sufficient stock of halfpennies to go round the family twice.

Gavin was born in Harvie, but left it at such an early age that he could only recall thatched houses with nets drying on the roofs, and a sandy shore in which coarse grass grew.

In the picture he could not pick out the house of his birth, though he might have been able to go to it had he ever returned to the village. Soon he learned that his mother did not care to speak of Harvie, and perhaps he thought that she had forgotten it too, all save one scene to which his memory still guided him. When his mind wandered to Harvie, Gavin saw the door of his home open and a fisherman enter, who scratched his head and then said, "Your man 's drowned, missis." Gavin seemed to see many women crying, and his mother staring at them with a face suddenly painted white, and next to hear a voice that was his own saying, "Never mind, mother; I'll be a man to you now, and I'll need breeks for the burial." But Adam required no funeral, for his body lay deep in the sea.

Gavin thought that this was the tragedy of his mother's life, and the most memorable event of his own childhood. But it was neither. When Margaret, even after she came

to Thrums, thought of Harvie, it was not at Adam's death she shuddered, but at the recollection of me.

It would ill become me to take a late revenge on Adam Dishart now by saying what is not true of him. Though he died a fisherman he was a sailor for a great part of his life, and doubtless his recklessness was washed into him on the high seas, where in his time men made a crony of death, and drank merrily over dodging it for another night. To me his roars of laughter without cause were as repellent as a boy's drum; yet many faces that were long in my company brightened at his coming, and women, with whom, despite my learning, I was in no wise a favourite, ran to their doors to listen to him as readily as to the bell-man. Children scurried from him if his mood was savage, but to him at all other times, while me they merely disregarded. There was always a smell of the sea about him. He had a rolling gait, unless

he was drunk, when he walked very straight, and before both sexes he boasted that any woman would take him for his beard alone. Of this beard he took prodigious care, though otherwise thinking little of his appearance, and I now see that he understood women better than I did, who had nevertheless reflected much about them. It cannot be said that he was vain, for though he thought he attracted women strangely, that, I maintain, is a weakness common to all men, and so no more to be marvelled at than a stake in a fence. Foreign oaths were the nails with which he held his talk together, yet I doubt not they were a curiosity gathered at sea, like his chains of shells, more for his own pleasure than for others' pain. His friends gave them no weight, and when he wanted to talk emphatically he kept them back, though they were then as troublesome to him as eggs to the bird-nesting boy who has to speak with his spoil in his mouth.

Adam was drowned on Gavin's fourth birthday, a year after I had to leave Harvie. He was blown off his smack in a storm, and could not reach the rope his partner flung him. "It's no go, lad," he shouted; "so long, Jim," and sank.

A month afterwards Margaret sold her share in the smack, which was all Adam left her, and the furniture of the house was rouped. She took Gavin to Glasgow, where her only brother needed a housekeeper, and there mother and son remained until Gavin got his call to Thrums. During those seventeen years I lost knowledge of them as completely as Margaret had lost knowledge of me. On hearing of Adam's death I went back to Harvie to try to trace her, but she had feared this, and so told no one where she was going.

According to Margaret, Gavin's genius showed itself while he was still a child. He was born with a brow whose nobility im-

pressed her from the first. It was a minister's brow, and though Margaret herself was no scholar, being as slow to read as she was quick at turning bannocks on the girdle, she decided, when his age was still counted by months, that the ministry had need of him. In those days the first question asked of a child was not "Tell me your name," but "What are you to be?" and one child in every family replied "A minister." He was set apart for the Church as doggedly as the shilling a week for the rent, and the rule held good though the family consisted of only one boy. From his earliest days Gavin thought he had been fashioned for the ministry as certainly as a spade for digging, and Margaret rejoiced and marvelled thereat, though she had made her own puzzle. An enthusiastic mother may bend her son's mind as she chooses if she begins at once; nay, she may do stranger things. I know a mother in Thrums who loves "features," and had a child

born with no chin to speak of. The neighbours expected this to bring her to the dust, but it only showed what a mother can do. In a few months that child had a chin with the best of them.

Margaret's brother died, but she remained in his single room, and, ever with a picture of her son in a pulpit to repay her, contrived to keep Gavin at school. Everything a woman's fingers can do Margaret's did better than most, and among the wealthy people who employed her—would that I could have the teaching of the sons of such as were good to her in those hard days!—her gentle manner was spoken of. For though Margaret had no schooling, she was a lady at heart, moving and almost speaking as one even in Harvie, where they did not perhaps like her the better for it.

At six Gavin hit another boy hard for belonging to the Established Church, and at seven he could not lose himself in the Shorter

Catechism. His mother expounded the Scriptures to him till he was eight, when he began to expound them to her. By this time he was studying the practical work of the pulpit as enthusiastically as ever medical student cut off a leg. From a front pew in the gallery Gavin watched the minister's every movement, noting that the first thing to do on ascending the pulpit is to cover your face with your hands, as if the exalted position affected you like a strong light, and the second to move the big Bible slightly, to show that the kirk officer, not having had a university education, could not be expected to know the very spot on which it ought to lie. Gavin saw that the minister joined in the singing more like one countenancing a seemly thing than because he needed it himself, and that he only sang a mouthful now and again after the congregation was in full pursuit of the precentor. It was noteworthy that the first prayer lasted longer than all

the others, and that to read the intimations about the Bible-class and the collection elsewhere than immediately before the last Psalm would have been as sacrilegious as to insert the dedication to King James at the end of Revelation. Sitting under a minister justly honoured in his day, the boy was often some words in advance of him, not vainglorious of his memory, but fervent, eager, and regarding the preacher as hardly less sacred than the Book. Gavin was encouraged by his frightened yet admiring mother to saw the air from their pew as the minister sawed it in the pulpit, and two benedictions were pronounced twice a Sabbath in that church, in the same words, the same manner, and simultaneously.

There was a black year when the things of this world, especially its pastimes, took such a grip of Gavin that he said to Margaret he would rather be good at the high jump than the author of "The Pilgrim's Progress." That year passed, and Gavin came

to his right mind. One afternoon Margaret was at home making a glengarry for him out of a piece of carpet, and giving it a tartan edging, when the boy bounded in from school, crying, "Come quick, mother, and you 'll see him." Margaret reached the door in time to see a street musician flying from Gavin and his friends. "Did you take stock of him, mother?" the boy asked when he reappeared with the mark of a muddy stick on his back. "He 's a Papist!—a sore sight, mother, a sore sight. We stoned him for persecuting the noble Martyrs."

When Gavin was twelve he went to the University, and also got a place in a shop as errand boy. He used to run through the streets between his work and his classes. Potatoes and salt fish, which could then be got at twopence the pound if bought by the half-hundredweight, were his food. There was not always a good meal for two, yet when Gavin reached home at night there was

generally something ready for him, and Margaret had supped "hours ago." Gavin's hunger urged him to fall to, but his love for his mother made him watchful.

"What did you have yourself, mother?" he would demand suspiciously.

"Oh, I had a fine supper, I assure you."

"What had you?"

"I had potatoes, for one thing."

"And dripping?"

"You may be sure."

"Mother, you're cheating me. The dripping hasn't been touched since yesterday."

"I dinna—don't—care for dripping—no much."

Then would Gavin stride the room fiercely, a queer little figure.

"Do you think I'll stand this, mother? Will I let myself be pampered with dripping and every delicacy while you starve?"

"Gavin, I really dinna care for dripping."

"Then I'll give up my classes, and we can have butter."

"I assure you I'm no hungry. It's different wi' a growing laddie."

"I'm not a growing laddie," Gavin would say, bitterly; "but, mother, I warn you that not another bite passes my throat till I see you eating too."

So Margaret had to take her seat at the table, and when she said "I can eat no more," Gavin retorted sternly, "Nor will I, for fine I see through you."

These two were as one far more than most married people, and, just as Gavin in his childhood reflected his mother, she now reflected him. The people for whom she sewed thought it was contact with them that had rubbed the broad Scotch from her tongue, but she was only keeping pace with Gavin. When she was excited the Harvie words came back to her, as they come back to me. I have taught the English language all my life, and I try to write it, but

everything I say in this book I first think to myself in the Doric. This, too, I notice, that in talking to myself I am broader than when gossiping with the farmers of the glen, who send their children to me to learn English, and then jeer at them if they say "old lights" instead of "auld lichts."

To Margaret it was happiness to sit through the long evenings sewing, and look over her work at Gavin as he read or wrote or recited to himself the learning of the schools. But she coughed every time the weather changed, and then Gavin would start.

"You must go to your bed, mother," he would say, tearing himself from his books; or he would sit beside her and talk of the dream that was common to both—a dream of a manse where Margaret was mistress and Gavin was called the minister. Every night Gavin was at his mother's bedside to wind her shawl round her feet, and while he did it Margaret smiled.

"Mother, this is the chaff pillow you've

taken out of my bed, and given me your feather one."

"Gavin, you needna change them. I winna have the feather pillow."

"Do you dare to think I'll let you sleep on chaff? Put up your head. Now, is that soft?"

"It's fine. I dinna deny but what I sleep better on feathers. Do you mind, Gavin, you bought this pillow for me the moment you got your bursary money?"

The reserve that is a wall between many of the Scottish poor had been broken down by these two. When he saw his mother sleeping happily, Gavin went back to his work. To save the expense of a lamp, he would put his book almost beneath the dying fire, and, taking the place of the fender, read till he was shivering with cold.

"Gavin, it is near morning, and you not in your bed yet! What are you thinking about so hard?"

"Oh, mother, I was wondering if the time would ever come when I would be a minister, and you would have an egg for your breakfast every morning."

So the years passed, and soon Gavin would be a minister. He had now sermons to prepare, and every one of them was first preached to Margaret. How solemn was his voice, how his eyes flashed, how stern were his admonitions.

"Gavin, such a sermon I never heard. The spirit of God is on you. I'm ashamed you should have me for a mother."

"God grant, mother," Gavin said, little thinking what was soon to happen, or he would have made this prayer on his knees, "that you may never be ashamed to have me for a son."

"Ah, mother," he would say wistfully, "it is not a great sermon, but do you think I'm preaching Christ? That is what I try, but I'm carried away and forget to watch myself."

"The Lord has you by the hand, Gavin;

and mind, I dinna say that because you're my laddie."

"Yes you do, mother, and well I know it, and yet it does me good to hear you."

That it did him good, I who would fain have shared those days with them, am very sure. The praise that comes of love does not make us vain, but humble rather. Knowing what we are, the pride that shines in our mother's eyes as she looks at us, is about the most pathetic thing a man has to face, but he would be a devil altogether if it did not burn some of the sin out of him.

Not long before Gavin preached for our kirk and got his call, a great event took place in the little room at Glasgow. The student appeared for the first time before his mother in his ministerial clothes. He wore the black silk hat, that was destined to become a terror to evil-doers in Thrums, and I dare say he was rather puffed up about himself that day. You would probably have smiled at him.

"It's a pity I'm so little, mother," he said with a sigh.

"You're no what I would call a particularly long man," Margaret said, "but you're just the height I like."

Then Gavin went out in his grandeur, and Margaret cried for an hour. She was thinking of me as well as of Gavin, and as it happens, I know that I was thinking at the same time of her. Gavin kept a diary in those days, which I have seen, and by comparing it with mine, I discovered that while he was showing himself to his mother in his black clothes, I was on my way back from Tilliedrum, where I had gone to buy a sand-glass for the school. The one I bought was so like another Margaret had used at Harvie that it set me thinking of her again all the way home. This is a matter hardly worth mentioning, and yet it interests me.

Busy days followed the call to Thrums, and Gavin had difficulty in forcing himself to

his sermons when there was always something more to tell his mother about the weaving town they were going to, or about the manse or the furniture that had been transferred to him by the retiring minister. The little room which had become so familiar that it seemed one of a family party of three had to be stripped, and many of its contents were sold. Among what were brought to Thrums was a little exercise book, in which Margaret had tried, unknown to Gavin, to teach herself writing and grammar, that she might be less unfit for a manse. He found it accidentally one day. It was full of "I am, thou art, he is," and the like, written many times in a shaking hand. Gavin put his arms round his mother when he saw what she had been doing. The exercise book is in my desk now, and will be my little maid's when I die.

"Gavin, Gavin," Margaret said many times in those last days at Glasgow, "to think it has all come true!"

"Let the last word you say in the house be a prayer of thankfulness," she whispered to him when they were taking a final glance at the old home.

In the bare room they called the house, the little minister and his mother went on their knees, but, as it chanced, their last word there was not addressed to God.

"Gavin," Margaret whispered as he took her arm, "do you think this bonnet sets me?"

CHAPTER III.

THE NIGHT-WATCHERS.

What first struck Margaret in Thrums was the smell of the caddis. The town smells of caddis no longer, but whiffs of it may be got even now as one passes the houses of the old, where the lay still swings at little windows like a great ghost pendulum. To me it is a homely smell, which I draw in with a great breath, but it was as strange to Margaret as the weavers themselves, who, in their coloured nightcaps and corduroys streaked with threads, gazed at her and Gavin. The little minister was trying to look severe and old, but twenty-one was in his eye.

"Look, mother, at that white house with the green roof. That is the manse."

The manse stands high, with a sharp eye on all the town. Every back window in the Tenements has a glint of it, and so the back

of the Tenements is always better behaved than the front. It was in the front that Jamie Don, a pitiful bachelor all his life because he thought the women proposed, kept his ferrets, and here, too, Beattie hanged himself, going straight to the clothes-posts for another rope when the first one broke, such was his determination. In the front Sanders Gilruth openly boasted (on Don's potato-pit) that by having a seat in two churches he could lie in bed on Sabbath and get the credit of being at one or other. (Gavin made short work of him.) To the right-minded the Auld Licht manse was as a family Bible, ever lying open before them, but Beattie spoke for more than himself when he said, "Dagon that manse! I never gie a swear but there it is glowering at me."

The manse looks down on the town from the north-east, and is reached from the road that leaves Thrums behind it in another moment by a wide, straight path, so rough that

to carry a fraught of water to the manse without spilling was to be superlatively good at one thing. Packages in a cart it set leaping like trout in a fishing-creel. Opposite the opening of the garden wall in the manse, where for many years there had been an intention of putting up a gate, were two big stones a yard apart, standing ready for the winter, when the path was often a rush of yellow water, and this the only bridge to the glebe dyke, down which the minister walked to church.

When Margaret entered the manse on Gavin's arm, it was a whitewashed house of five rooms, with a garret in which the minister could sleep if he had guests, as during the Fast week. It stood with its garden within high walls, and the roof facing southward was carpeted with moss that shone in the sun in a dozen shades of green and yellow. Three firs guarded the house from west winds, but blasts from the north often tore down the steep fields and skirled through the manse, banging

all its doors at once. A beech, growing on the east side, leant over the roof as if to gossip with the well in the courtyard. The garden was to the south, and was over full of gooseberry and currant bushes. It contained a summer seat, where strange things were soon to happen.

Margaret would not even take off her bonnet until she had seen through the manse and opened all the presses. The parlour and kitchen were downstairs, and of the three rooms above, the study was so small that Gavin's predecessor could touch each of its walls without shifting his position. Every room save Margaret's had long-lidded beds, which close as if with shutters, but hers was coff-fronted, or comparatively open, with carving on the wood like the ornamentation of coffins. Where there were children in a house they liked to slope the boards of the closed-in bed against the dresser, and play at sliding down mountains on them.

But for many years there had been no

children in the manse. He in whose ways Gavin was to attempt the heavy task of walking had been a widower three months after his marriage, a man narrow when he came to Thrums, but so large-hearted when he left it that I, who know there is good in all the world because of the lovable souls I have met in this corner of it, yet cannot hope that many are as near to God as he. The most gladsome thing in the world is that few of us fall very low; the saddest that, with such capabilities, we seldom rise high. Of those who stand perceptibly above their fellows I have known very few; only Mr. Carfrae and two or three women.

Gavin only saw a very frail old minister who shook as he walked, as if his feet were striking against stones. He was to depart on the morrow to the place of his birth, but he came to the manse to wish his successor God-speed. Strangers were so formidable to Margaret that she only saw him from her window.

"May you never lose sight of God, Mr.

Dishart," the old man said in the parlour. Then he added, as if he had asked too much, "May you never turn from Him as I often did when I was a lad like you."

As this aged minister, with the beautiful face that God gives to all who love Him and follow His commandments, spoke of his youth, he looked wistfully around the faded parlour.

"It is like a dream," he said. "The first time I entered this room the thought passed through me that I would cut down that cherry-tree, because it kept out the light, but, you see, it outlives me. I grew old while looking for the axe. Only yesterday I was the young minister, Mr. Dishart, and to-morrow you will be the old one, bidding good-bye to your successor."

His eyes came back to Gavin's eager face.

"You are very young, Mr. Dishart?"

"Nearly twenty-one."

"Twenty-one! Ah, my dear sir, you do not know how pathetic that sounds to me. Twenty-one! We are children for the second time at

twenty-one, and again when we are grey and put all our burden on the Lord. The young talk generously of relieving the old of their burdens, but the anxious heart is to the old when they see a load on the back of the young. Let me tell you, Mr. Dishart, that I would condone many things in one-and-twenty now that I dealt hardly with at middle age. God Himself, I think, is very willing to give one-and-twenty a second chance."

"I am afraid," Gavin said anxiously, "that I look even younger."

"I think," Mr. Carfrae answered smiling, "that your heart is as fresh as your face; and that is well. The useless men are those who never change with the years. Many views that I held to in my youth and long afterwards are a pain to me now, and I am carrying away from Thrums memories of errors into which I fell at every stage of my ministry. When you are older you will know that life is a long lesson in humility."

He paused.

"I hope," he said nervously, "that you don't sing the Paraphrases?"

Mr. Carfrae had not grown out of all his prejudices, you see; indeed, if Gavin had been less bigoted than he on this question they might have parted stiffly. The old minister would rather have remained to die in his pulpit than surrender it to one who read his sermons. Others may blame him for this, but I must say here plainly that I never hear a minister reading without wishing to send him back to college.

"I cannot deny," Mr. Carfrae said, "that I broke down more than once to-day. This forenoon I was in Tillyloss, for the last time, and it so happens that there is scarcely a house in it in which I have not had a marriage or prayed over a coffin. Ah, sir, these are the scenes that make the minister more than all his sermons. You must join the family, Mr. Dishart, or you are only a minister once a week. And remember this, if your call is from above it is a call to stay.

Many such partings in a lifetime as I have had to-day would be too heartrending."

"And yet," Gavin said, hesitatingly, "they told me in Glasgow that I had received a call from the mouth of hell."

"Those were cruel words, but they only mean that people who are seldom more than a day's work in advance of want sometimes rise in arms for food. Our weavers are passionately religious, and so independent that they dare any one to help them, but if their wages were lessened they could not live. And so at talk of reduction they catch fire. Change of any kind alarms them, and though they call themselves Whigs, they rose a few years ago over the paving of the streets and stoned the workmen, who were strangers, out of the town.

"And though you may have thought the place quiet to-day, Mr. Dishart, there was an ugly outbreak only two months ago, when the weavers turned on the manufacturers for reducing the price of the web, made a bonfire

of some of their doors, and terrified one of them into leaving Thrums. Under the command of some Chartists, the people next paraded the streets to the music of fife and drum, and six policemen who drove up from Tilliedrum in a light cart were sent back tied to the seats."

"No one has been punished?"

"Not yet, but nearly two years ago there was a similar riot, and the sheriff took no action for months. Then one night the square suddenly filled with soldiers, and the ringleaders were seized in their beds. Mr. Dishart, the people are determined not to be caught in that way again, and ever since the rising a watch has been kept by night on every road that leads to Thrums. The signal that the soldiers are coming is to be the blowing of a horn. If you ever hear that horn, I implore you to hasten to the square."

"The weavers would not fight?"

"You do not know how the Chartists have

fired this part of the country. One misty day, a week ago, I was on the hill; I thought I had it to myself, when suddenly I heard a voice cry sharply, 'Shoulder arms.' I could see no one, and after a moment I put it down to a freak of the wind. Then all at once the mist before me blackened, and a body of men seemed to grow out of it. They were not shadows; they were Thrums weavers drilling, with pikes in their hands.

"They broke up," Mr. Carfrae continued, after a pause, "at my entreaty, but they have met again since then."

"And there were Auld Lichts among them?" Gavin asked. "I should have thought they would be frightened at our precentor, Lang Tammas, who seems to watch for backsliding in the congregation as if he had pleasure in discovering it."

Gavin spoke with feeling, for the precentor had already put him through his catechism, and it was a stiff ordeal.

"The precentor!" said Mr. Carfrae. "Why, he was one of them."

The old minister, once so brave a figure, tottered as he rose to go, and reeled in a dizziness until he had walked a few paces. Gavin went with him to the foot of the manse road; without his hat, as all Thrums knew before bedtime.

"I begin," Gavin said, as they were parting, where you leave off, and my prayer is that I may walk in your ways."

"Ah, Mr. Dishart," the white-haired minister said, with a sigh, "the world does not progress so quickly as a man grows old. You only begin where I began."

He left Gavin, and then, as if the little minister's last words had hurt him, turned and solemnly pointed his staff upward. Such men are the strong nails that keep the world together.

The twenty-one-years-old minister returned to the manse somewhat sadly, but when he saw his mother at the window of her bed-room, his

heart leapt at the thought that she was with him and he had eighty pounds a year. Gaily he waved both his hands to her, and she answered with a smile, and then, in his boyishness, he jumped over a gooseberry bush. Immediately afterwards he reddened and tried to look venerable, for while in the air he had caught sight of two women and a man watching him from the dyke. He walked severely to the door, and, again forgetting himself, was bounding upstairs to Margaret, when Jean, the servant, stood scandalised in his way.

"I don't think she caught me," was Gavin's reflection, and "The Lord preserve 's!" was Jean's.

Gavin found his mother wondering how one should set about getting a cup of tea in a house that had a servant in it. He boldly rang the bell, and the willing Jean answered it so promptly (in a rush and jump) that Margaret was as much startled as Aladdin the first time he rubbed his lamp.

Manse servants of the most admired kind move softly, as if constant contact with a minister were goloshes to them; but Jean was new and raw, only having got her place because her father might be an elder any day. She had already conceived a romantic affection for her master; but to say "sir" to him—as she thirsted to do—would have been as difficult to her as to swallow oysters. So anxious was she to please that when Gavin rang she fired herself at the bed-room, but bells were novelties to her as well as to Margaret, and she cried, excitedly, "What is 't?" thinking the house must be on fire.

"There's a curran folk at the back door," Jean announced later, "and their respects to you, and would you gie them some water out o' the well? It has been a drouth this aucht days, and the pumps is locked. "Na," she said, as Gavin made a too liberal offer, "that would toom the well, and there's jimply enough for oursels. I should tell you, too, that three o' them is no Auld Lichts."

"Let that make no difference," Gavin said grandly, but Jean changed his message to: "A bowlful apiece to Auld Lichts; all other denominations one cupful."

"Ay, ay," said Sneeky Hobart, letting down the bucket, "and we'll include atheists among other denominations." The conversation came to Gavin and Margaret through the kitchen doorway.

"Dinna class Jo Cruickshanks wi' me," said Sam'l Langlands the U.P.

"Na, na," said Cruickshanks the atheist, "I'm ower independent to be religious. I dinna gang to the kirk to cry, 'Oh, Lord, gie, gie, gie.'"

"Take tent o' yoursel', my man," said Lang Tammas sternly, "or you'll soon be whaur you would neifer the warld for a cup o' that cauld water."

"Maybe you've ower keen an interest in the devil, Tammas," retorted the atheist, "but, ony way, if it's heaven for climate, it's hell for company."

"Lads," said Snecky, sitting down on the bucket, "we'll send Mr. Dishart to Jo. He'll make another Rob Dow o' him."

"Speak mair reverently o' your minister," said the precentor. "He has the gift."

"I hinna naturally your solemn rasping word, Tammas, but in the heart I speak in all reverence. Lads, the minister has a word! I tell you he prays near like one giving orders."

"At first," Snecky continued, "I thocht yon lang candidate was the earnestest o' them a', and I dinna deny but when I saw him wi' his head bowed-like in prayer during the singing I says to mysel', 'Thou art the man.' Ay, but Betsy wraxed up her head, and he wasna praying. He was combing his hair wi' his fingers on the sly."

"You ken fine, Sneck," said Cruickshanks, "that you said, 'Thou art the man' to ilka ane o' them, and just voted for Mr. Dishart because he preached hinmost."

"I didna say it to Mr. Urquhart, the ane

that preached second," Sneck said. "That was the lad that gaed through ither."

"Ay," said Susy Tibbits, nicknamed by Haggart "the Timidest Woman" because she once said she was too young to marry, "but I was fell sorry for him, him just being over anxious. He began bonny, flinging himself, like ane inspired, at the pulpit door, but after Hendry Munn pointed at it and cried out, 'Be cautious, the sneck's loose,' he a' gaed to bits. What a coolness Hendry has, though I suppose it was his duty, him being kirk-officer."

"We didna want a man," Lang Tammas said, "that could be put out by sic a sma' thing as that. Mr. Urquhart was in sic a ravel after it that when he gies out the first line o' the hunder and nineteenth psalm for singing, says he, 'And so on to the end.' Ay, that finished his chance."

"The noblest o' them to look at," said Tibbie Birse, "was that ane frae Aberdeen, him that had sic a saft side to Jacob."

"Ay," said Snecky, "and I speired at Dr.

McQueen if I should vote for him. 'Looks like a genius, does he?' says the Doctor. 'Weel, then,' says he, 'dinna vote for him, for my experience is that there's no folk sic idiots as them that looks like geniuses.'"

"Sal," Susy said, "it's a guid thing we've settled, for I enjoyed sitting like a judge upon them so muckle that I sair doubt it was a kind o' sport to me."

"It was no sport to them, Susy, I'se uphaud, but it is a blessing we've settled, and ondoubtedly we've got the pick o' them. The only thing Mr. Dishart did that made me oneasy was his saying the word Cæsar as if it began wi' a *k*."

"He'll startle you mair afore you're done wi' him," the atheist said maliciously. "I ken the ways o' thae ministers preaching for kirks. Oh, they're cunning. You was a' pleased that Mr. Dishart spoke about looms and webs, but, lathies, it was a trick. Ilka ane o' thae young ministers has a sermon about looms for weaving congregations, and a second about beating swords

into ploughshares for country places, and another on the great catch of fishes for fishing villages. That's their stock-in-trade; and just you wait and see if you dinna get the ploughshares and the fishes afore the month's out. A minister preaching for a kirk is one thing, but a minister placed in't may be a very different berry."

"Joseph Cruickshanks," cried the precentor, passionately, "none o' your d——d blasphemy!"

They all looked at Whamond, and he dug his teeth into his lips in shame.

"Wha's swearing now?" said the Atheist.

But Whamond was quick.

"Matthew, twelve and thirty-one," he said.

"Dagont, Tammas," exclaimed the baffled Cruickshanks, "you're aye quoting Scripture. How do you no quote Feargus O'Connor?"

"Lads," said Sneeky, "Jo' hasna heard Mr. Dishart's sermons. Ay, we get it scalding when he comes to the sermon. I canna thole

a minister that preaches as if heaven was round the corner."

"If you're hitting at our minister, Snecky," said James Cochrane, "let me tell you he's a better man than yours."

"A better curler, I dare say."

"A better prayer."

"Ay, he can pray for a black frost as if it was ane o' the Royal Family. I ken his prayers, 'O Lord, let it haud for anither day, and keep the snaw awa'.' Will you pretend, Jeames, that Mr. Duthie could make onything o' Rob Dow?"

"I admit that Rob's awakening was an extraordinary thing, and sufficient to gi'e Mr. Dishart a name. But Mr. Carfrae was baffled wi' Rob too."

"Jeames, if you had been in our kirk that day Mr. Dishart preached for't you would be wearying the now for Sabbath, to be back in't again. As you ken, that wicked man there, Jo Cruickshanks, got Rob Dow, drucken, curs-

ing, poaching Rob Dow, to come to the kirk to annoy the minister. Ay, he hadna been at that work for ten minutes when Mr. Dishart stopped in his first prayer and ga'e Rob a look. I couldna see the look, being in the precentor's box, but as sure as death I felt it boring through me. Rob is hard wood, though, and soon he was at his tricks again. Weel, the minister stopped a second time in the sermon, and so awful was the silence that a heap o' the congregation couldna keep their seats. I heard Rob breathing quick and strong. Mr. Dishart had his arm pointed at him a' this time, and at last he says sternly, 'Come forward.' Listen, Joseph Cruickshanks, and tremble. Rob gripped the board to keep himsel' frae obeying, and again Mr. Dishart says, 'Come forward,' and syne Rob rose shaking, and tottered to the pulpit stair like a man suddenly shot into the Day of Judgment. 'You hulking man of sin,' cries Mr. Dishart, not a tick fleid, though Rob's as big as three o' him, 'sit down on the stair

and attend to me, or I'll step doun frae the pulpit and run you out of the house of God.' "

"And since that day," said Hobart, "Rob has worshipped Mr. Dishart as a man that has stepped out o' the Bible. When the carriage passed this day we was discussing the minister, and Sam'l Dickie wasna sure but what Mr. Dishart wore his hat rather far back on his head. You should ha'e seen Rob. 'My certie,' he roars, 'there's the shine frae Heaven on that little minister's face, and them as says there's no has me to fecht.' "

"Ay, weel," said the U.P., rising, "we'll see how Rob wears—and how your minister wears too. I wouldna like to sit in a kirk whaur they daurna sing a paraphrase."

"The Psalms of David," retorted Whamond, "mount straight to heaven, but your paraphrases sticks to the ceiling o' the kirk."

"You're a bigoted set, Tammas Whamond, but I tell you this, and it's my last words to

you the nicht, the day'll come when you'll hae Mr. Duthie, ay, and even the U.P. minister, preaching in the Auld Licht kirk."

"And let this be my last words to you," replied the precentor, furiously; "that rather than see a U.P. preaching in the Auld Licht kirk I would burn in hell fire for ever!"

This gossip increased Gavin's knowledge of the grim men with whom he had now to deal. But as he sat beside Margaret after she had gone to bed, their talk was pleasant.

"You remember, mother," Gavin said, "how I almost prayed for the manse that was to give you an egg every morning. I have been telling Jean never to forget the egg."

"Ah, Gavin, things have come about so much as we wanted that I'm a kind o' troubled. It's hardly natural, and I hope nothing terrible is to happen now."

Gavin arranged her pillows as she liked them, and when he next stole into the room in his stocking soles to look at her, he thought

she was asleep. But she was not. I dare say she saw at that moment Gavin in his first frock, and Gavin in knickerbockers, and Gavin as he used to walk into the Glasgow room from college, all still as real to her as the Gavin who had a kirk.

The little minister took away the lamp to his own room, shaking his fist at himself for allowing his mother's door to creak. He pulled up his blind. The town lay as still as salt. But a steady light showed in the south, and on pressing his face against the window he saw another in the west. Mr. Carfrae's words about the night-watch came back to him. Perhaps it had been on such a silent night as this that the soldiers marched into Thrums. Would they come again?

CHAPTER IV.

FIRST COMING OF THE EGYPTIAN WOMAN.

A LEARNED man says in a book, otherwise beautiful with truth, that villages are family groups. To him Thrums would only be a village, though town is the word we have ever used, and this is not true of it. Doubtless we have interests in common, from which a place so near (but the road is heavy) as Tilliedrum is shut out, and we have an individuality of our own too, as if, like our red houses, we came from a quarry that supplies no other place. But we are not one family. In the old days, those of us who were of the Tenements seldom wandered to the Croft head, and if we did go there we saw men to whom we could not always give a name. To flit from the Tanage brae to Haggart's roady was to change one's friends. A kirk-wynd weaver might kill his swine and Tillyloss not know of it until boys ran westward hitting each other with the

bladders. Only the voice of the dulsemen could be heard all over Thrums at once. Thus even in a small place but a few outstanding persons are known to everybody.

In eight days Gavin's figure was more familiar in Thrums than many that had grown bent in it. He had already been twice to the cemetery, for a minister only reaches his new charge in time to attend a funeral. Though short of stature he cast a great shadow. He was so full of his duties, Jean said, that though he pulled to the door as he left the manse, he had passed the currant bushes before it snecked. He darted through courts, and invented ways into awkward houses. If you did not look up quickly he was round the corner. His visiting exhausted him only less than his zeal in the pulpit, from which, according to report, he staggered damp with perspiration to the vestry, where Hendry Munn wrung him like a wet clout. A deaf lady, celebrated for giving out her washing, compelled him to hold her trumpet until she had peered

into all his crannies, with the Shorter Catechism for a lantern. Janet Dundas told him, in answer to his knock, that she could not abide him, but she changed her mind when he said her garden was quite a show. The wives who expected a visit scrubbed their floors for him, cleaned out their presses for him, put diamond socks on their bairns for him, rubbed their hearthstones blue for him, even tidied up the garret for him, and triumphed over the neighbours whose houses he passed by. For Gavin blundered occasionally by inadvertence, as when he gave dear old Betty Davie occasion to say bitterly :—

"Ou ay, you can sail by my door and gang to Easie's, but I'm thinking you would stop at mine too if I had a brass handle on't."

So passed the first four weeks, and then came the fateful night of the seventeenth of October, and with it the strange woman. Family worship at the manse was over, and Gavin was talking to his mother, who never crossed the threshold save to go to church (though her

activity at home was among the marvels Jean sometimes slipped down to the Tenements to announce), when Wearyworld the policeman came to the door "with Rob Dow's compliments, and if you're no wi' me by ten o'clock I'm to break out again." Gavin knew what this meant, and at once set off for Rob's.

"You'll let me gang a bit wi' you," the policeman entreated, "for till Rob sent me on this errand not a soul has spoken to me the day; ay, mony a ane hae I spoken to, but not a man, woman, nor bairn would fling me a word."

"I often meant to ask you," Gavin said as they went along the Tenements, which smelled at that hour of roasted potatoes, "why you are so unpopular."

"It's because I'm police. I'm the first ane that has ever been in Thrums, and the very folk that appointed me at a crown a week looks upon me as a disgraced man for accepting. It's Gospel that my ain wife is short wi' me when I've on my uniform, though weel she kens that

I would rather hae stuck to the loom if I hadna ha'en sic a queer richt leg. Nobody feels the shame o' my position as I do mysel', but this is a town without pity."

"It should be a consolation to you that you are discharging useful duties."

"But I'm no. I'm doing harm. There's Charles Dickson says that the very sicht o' my uniform rouses his dander so muckle that it makes him break windows, though a peaceably-disposed man till I was appointed. And what's the use o' their haeing a policeman when they winna come to the lock-up after I lay hands on them?"

"Do they say they won't come?"

"Say? Catch them saying onything! They just gie me a wap into the gutters. If they would speak I wouldna complain, for I'm nat'rally the sociablest man in Thrums."

"Rob, however, had spoken to you."

"Because he had need o' me. That was ay Rob's way, converted or no converted.

When he was blind drunk he would order me to see him safe hame, but would he crack wi' me? Na, na."

Wearyworld, who was so called because of his forlorn way of muttering, "It's a weary warld, and nobody bides in't" as he went his melancholy rounds, sighed like one about to cry, and Gavin changed the subject.

"Is the watch for the soldiers still kept up?" he asked.

"It is, but the watchers winna let me in aside them. I'll let you see that for yoursel' at the head o' the Roods, for they watch there in the auld windmill."

Most of the Thrums lights were already out, and that in the windmill disappeared as footsteps were heard.

"You're desperate characters," the policeman cried, but got no answer. He changed his tactics.

"A fine nicht for the time o' year," he cried. No answer.

"But I wouldna wonder," he shouted, "though we had rain afore morning." No answer.

"Surely you could gie me a word frae ahint the door. You're doing an onlawful thing, but I dinna ken wha you are."

"You'll swear to that?" some one asked gruffly.

"I swear to it, Peter."

Wearyworld tried another six remarks in vain.

"Ay," he said to the minister, "that's what it is to be an onpopular man. And now I'll hae to turn back, for the very anes that winna let me join them would be the first to complain if I gaed out o' bounds."

Gavin found Dow at New Zealand, a hamlet of mud houses, whose tenants could be seen on any Sabbath morning washing themselves in the burn that trickled hard by. Rob's son, Micah, was asleep at the door, but he brightened when he saw who was shaking him.

"My father put me out," he explained, "because he's daft for the drink, and was fleid he would curse me. He hasna cursed me," Micah added, proudly, "for an aught days come Sabbath. Hearken to him at his loom. He daurna take his feet off the treadles for fear o' running straught to the drink."

Gavin went in. The loom, and two stools, the one four-footed and the other a buffet, were Rob's most conspicuous furniture. A shaving-strap hung on the wall. The fire was out, but the trunk of a tree, charred at one end, showed how he heated his house. He made a fire of peat, and on it placed one end of a tree trunk that might be six feet long. As the tree burned away it was pushed further into the fireplace, and a roaring fire could always be got by kicking pieces of the smouldering wood and blowing them into flame with the bellows. When Rob saw the minister he groaned relief and left his loom. He had been

weaving, his teeth clenched, his eyes on fire, for seven hours.

"I wasna fleid," little Micah said to the neighbours afterwards, "to gang in wi' the minister. He's a fine man that. He didna ca' my father names. Na, he said, 'You're a brave fellow, Rob,' and he took my father's hand, he did. My father was shaking after his fecht wi' the drink, and, says he, 'Mr. Dishart,' he says, 'if you'll let me break out nows and nans, I could bide straucht atween times, but I canna keep sober if I hinna a drink to look forrit to.' Ay, my father prigged sair to get one fou day in the month, and he said, 'Syne if I die sudden, there's thirty chances to one that I gang to heaven, so it's worth risking.' But Mr. Dishart wouldna hear o't, and he cries, 'No, by God,' he cries, 'we'll wrestle wi' the devil till we throttle him,' and down him and my father gaed on their knees.

"The minister prayed a lang time till my

father said his hunger for the drink was gone, 'but,' he says, 'it swells up in me o' a sudden aye, and it may be back afore you're hame.' 'Then come to me at once,' says Mr. Dishart; but my father says, 'Na, for it would haul me into the public-house as if it had me at the end o' a rope, but I'll send the laddie.'

"You saw my father crying the minister back? It was to gie him twa pound, and, says my father, 'God helping me,' he says, 'I'll droon mysel in the dam rather than let the drink master me, but in case it should get haud o' me and I should die drunk, it would be a michty gratification to me to ken that you had the siller to bury me respectable without ony help frae the poor's rates.' The minister wasna for taking it at first, but he took it when he saw how earnest my father was. Ay, he's a noble man. After he gaed awa my father made me learn the names o' the apostles frae Luke sixth, and he says to me, 'Miss out Bartholomew,' he says, 'for he

did little, and put Gavin Dishart in his place.'"

Feeling as old as he sometimes tried to look, Gavin turned homeward. Margaret was already listening for him. You may be sure she knew his step. I think our steps vary as much as the human face. My bookshelves were made by a blind man who could identify by their steps nearly all who passed his window. Yet he has admitted to me that he could not tell wherein my steps differed from others; and this I believe, though rejecting his boast that he could distinguish a minister's step from a doctor's, and even tell to which denomination the minister belonged.

I have sometimes asked myself what would have been Gavin's future had he gone straight home that night from Dow's. He would doubtless have seen the Egyptian before morning broke, but she would not have come upon him like a witch. There are, I dare say, many lovers who would never have been drawn to

each other had they met for the first time, as, say, they met the second time. But such dreaming is to no purpose. Gavin met Sanders Webster, the mole-catcher, and was persuaded by him to go home by Caddam Wood.

Gavin took the path to Caddam, because Sanders told him the Wild Lindsays were there, a gypsy family that threatened the farmers by day and danced devilishly, it was said, at night. The little minister knew them by repute as a race of giants, and that not many persons would have cared to face them alone at midnight, but he was feeling as one wound up to heavy duties, and meant to admonish them severely.

Sanders, an old man who lived with his sister Nanny on the edge of the wood, went with him, and for a time both were silent. But Sanders had something to say.

"Was you ever at the Spittal, Mr. Dishart?" he asked.

"Lord Rintoul's house at the top of Glen Quharity? No."

"Hae you ever looked on a lord?"

"No."

"Or on an auld lord's young leddyship? I have."

"What is she?"

"You surely ken that Rintoul's auld, and is to be married on a young leddyship. She's no' a leddyship yet, but they're to be married soon, so I may say I've seen a leddyship. Ay, an impressive sicht. It was yestreen."

"Is there a great difference in their ages?"

"As muckle as atween auld Peter Spens and his wife, wha was saxteen when he was saxty, and she was playing at dumps in the street when her man was waiting for her to make his porridge. Ay, sic a differ doesna suit wi' common folk, but of course earls can please themsels. Rintoul's so fond o' the leddyship 'at is to be, that when she was at the school in Edinbury he wrote to her ilka day. Kaytherine Crummie telled me that, and she says aince you're used to it, writing letters is as easy as skinning moles.

I dinna ken what they can write sic a heap about, but I daur say he gies her his views on the Chartist agitation and the potato disease, and she'll write back about the romantic sichts o' Edinbury and the sermons o' the grand preachers she hears. Sal, though, thae grand folk has no religion to speak o', for they're a' English kirk. You're no' speering what her leddyship said to me?"

"What did she say?"

"Weel, you see, there was a dancing ball on, and Kaytherine Crummie took me to a window whaur I could stand on a flower-pot and watch the critturs whirling round in the ball like teetotums. What's mair, she pointed out the leddyship that's to be to me, and I just gloured at her, for thinks I, 'Take your fill, Sanders, and whaur there 's lords and leddyships, dinna waste a minute on colonels and honourable misses and sic like dirt.' Ay, but what wi' my 'een blinking at the blaze o' candles, I lost sicht o' her till all at aince somebody says at my lug,

'Well, my man, and who is the prettiest lady in the room?' Mr. Dishart, it was her leddyship. She looked like a star."

"And what did you do?"

"The first thing I did was to fall aff the flower-pot, but syne I came to, and says I, wi' a polite smirk, 'I'm thinking your leddyship,' says I, 'as you're the bonniest yoursel'."

"I see you are a cute man, Sanders."

"Ay, but that's no' a'. She lauched in a pleased way and tapped me wi' her fan, and says she, 'Why do you think me the prettiest?' I dinna deny but what that staggered me, but I thocht a minute, and took a look at the other dancers again, and syne I says, michty sly like, 'The other leddies,' I says, 'has sic sma' feet.'"

Sanders stopped here and looked doubtingly at Gavin.

"I canna make up my mind," he said, "whether she liked that, for she rapped my knuckles wi' her fan fell sair, and aff she gaed. Ay, I consulted Tammas Haggart about it, and

he says, 'The flirty crittur,' he says. What would you say, Mr. Dishart?"

Gavin managed to escape without giving an answer, for here their roads separated. He did not find the wild Lindsays, however. Children of whim, of prodigious strength while in the open, but destined to wither quickly in the hot air of towns, they had gone from Caddam, leaving nothing of themselves behind but a black mark burned by their fires into the ground. Thus they branded the earth through many counties until some hour when the spirit of wandering again fell on them, and they forsook their hearths with as little compunction as the bird leaves its nest.

Gavin had walked quickly, and he now stood silently in the wood, his hat in his hand. In the moonlight the grass seemed tipped with hoar frost. Most of the beeches were already bare, but the shoots, clustering round them, like children at their mothers' skirts, still retained their leaves red and brown.

Among the pines these leaves were as incongruous as a wedding-dress at a funeral. Gavin was standing on grass, but there were patches of heather within sight, and broom, and the leaf of the blaeberry. Where the beeches had drawn up the earth with them as they grew, their roots ran this way and that, slippery to the feet and looking like disinterred bones. A squirrel appeared suddenly on the charred ground, looked doubtfully at Gavin to see if he was growing there, and then glided up a tree, where it sat eyeing him, and forgetting to conceal its shadow. Caddam was very still. At long intervals came from far away the whack of an axe on wood. Gavin was in a world by himself, and this might be someone breaking into it.

The mystery of woods by moonlight thrilled the little minister. His eyes rested on the shining roots, and he remembered what had been told him of the legend of Caddam, how once on a time it was a mighty wood, and a maiden most beautiful stood on its confines, panting and

afraid, for a wicked man pursued her; how he drew near, and she ran a little way into the wood, and he followed her, and she still ran, and still he followed, until both were for ever lost, and the bones of her pursuer lie beneath a beech, but the lady may still be heard singing in the woods if the night be fine, for then she is a glad spirit, but weeping when there is wild wind, for then she is but a mortal seeking a way out of the wood.

The squirrel slid down the fir and was gone. The axe's blows ceased. Nothing that moved was in sight. The wind that has its nest in trees was circling around with many voices, that never rose above a whisper, and were often but the echo of a sigh.

Gavin was in the Caddam of past days, where the beautiful maiden wanders ever, waiting for him who is so pure that he may find her. He will wander over the tree-tops looking for her, with the moon for his lamp, and some night he will hear her singing. The little

minister drew a deep breath, and his foot snapped a brittle twig. Then he remembered who and where he was, and stooped to pick up his staff. But he did not pick it up, for as his fingers were closing on it the lady began to sing.

For perhaps a minute Gavin stood stock still, like an intruder. Then he ran towards the singing, which seemed to come from Windyghoul, a straight road through Caddam that farmers use in summer, but leave in the back end of the year to leaves and pools. In Windyghoul there is either no wind or so much that it rushes down the sieve like an army, entering with a shriek of terror, and escaping with a derisive howl. The moon was crossing the avenue. But Gavin only saw the singer.

She was still fifty yards away, sometimes singing gleefully, and again letting her body sway lightly as she came dancing up Windyghoul. Soon she was within a few feet of the little minister, to whom singing, except when out of tune, was a suspicious thing, and dancing

a device of the devil. His arm went out wrathfully, and his intention was to pronounce sentence on this woman.

But she passed, unconscious of his presence, and he had not moved nor spoken. Though really of the average height, she was a little thing to the eyes of Gavin, who always felt tall and stout except when he looked down. The grace of her swaying figure was a new thing in the world to him. Only while she passed did he see her as a gleam of colour, a gypsy elf poorly clad, her bare feet flashing beneath a short green skirt, a twig of rowan berries stuck carelessly into her black hair. Her face was pale. She had an angel's loveliness. Gavin shook.

Still she danced onwards, but she was very human, for when she came to muddy water she let her feet linger in it, and flung up her arms, dancing more wantonly than before. A diamond on her finger shot a thread of fire over the pool. Undoubtedly she was the devil.

Gavin leaped into the avenue, and she heard him and looked behind. He tried to cry "Woman!" sternly, but lost the word, for now she saw him, and laughed with her shoulders, and beckoned to him, so that he shook his fist at her. She tripped on, but often turning her head beckoned and mocked him, and he forgot his dignity and his pulpit and all other things, and ran after her. Up Windyghoul did he pursue her, and it was well that the precentor was not there to see. She reached the mouth of the avenue, and kissing her hand to Gavin, so that the ring gleamed again, was gone.

The minister's one thought was to find her, but he searched in vain. She might be crossing the hill on her way to Thrums, or perhaps she was still laughing at him from behind a tree. After a longer time than he was aware of, Gavin realised that his boots were chirping and his trousers streaked with mud. Then he abandoned the search and hastened homewards in a rage.

From the hill to the manse the nearest way is down two fields, and the little minister descended them rapidly. Thrums, which is red in daylight, was grey and still as the cemetery. He had glimpses of several of its deserted streets. To the south the watch-light showed brightly, but no other was visible. So it seemed to Gavin, and then—suddenly—he lost the power to move. He had heard the horn. Thrice it sounded, and thrice it struck him to the heart. He looked again and saw a shadow stealing along the Tenements, then another, then half-a-dozen. He remembered Mr. Carfrae's words, "If you ever hear that horn, I implore you to hasten to the square," and in another minute he had reached the Tenements.

Now again he saw the gypsy. She ran past him, half-a-score of men, armed with staves and pikes, at her heels. At first he thought they were chasing her, but they were following her as a leader. Her eyes sparkled as she waved them to the square with her arms.

"The soldiers, the soldiers!" was the universal cry.

"Who is that woman?" demanded Gavin, catching hold of a frightened old man.

"Curse the Egyptian limmer," the man answered, "she's egging my laddie on to fecht."

"Bless her rather," the son cried, "for warning us that the sojers is coming. Put your ear to the ground, Mr. Dishart, and you'll hear the dirl o' their feet."

The young man rushed away to the square, flinging his father from him. Gavin followed. As he turned into the school-wynd, the town drum began to beat, windows were thrown open, and sullen men ran out of closes where women were screaming and trying to hold them back. At the foot of the wynd Gavin passed Sanders Webster.

"Mr. Dishart," the mole-catcher cried, "hae you seen that Egyptian? May I be struck dead if it's no' her little leddyship."

But Gavin did not hear him.

CHAPTER V.

A WARLIKE CHAPTER, CULMINATING IN THE FLOUTING OF THE MINISTER BY THE WOMAN.

"MR. DISHART!"

Jean had clutched at Gavin in Bank Street. Her hair was streaming, and her wrapper but half buttoned.

"Oh, Mr. Dishart, look at the mistress! I couldna keep her in the manse."

Gavin saw his mother beside him, bareheaded, trembling.

"How could I sit still, Gavin, and the town full o' the skirls of women and bairns? Oh, Gavin, what can I do for them? They will suffer most this night."

As Gavin took her hand he knew that Margaret felt for the people more than he.

"But you must go home, mother," he said, "and leave me to do my duty. I will

take you myself if you will not go with Jean. Be careful of her, Jean."

"Ay, will I," Jean answered, then burst into tears. "Mr. Dishart," she cried, "if they take my father they'd best take my mither too."

The two women went back to the manse, where Jean re-lit the fire, having nothing else to do, and boiled the kettle, while Margaret wandered in anguish from room to room.

Men nearly naked ran past Gavin, seeking to escape from Thrums by the fields he had descended. When he shouted to them they only ran faster. A Tillyloss weaver whom he tried to stop struck him savagely and sped past to the square. In Bank Street, which was full of people at one moment and empty the next, the minister stumbled over old Charles Yuill.

"Take me and welcome," Yuill cried, mistaking Gavin for the enemy. He had only one arm through the sleeve of his jacket, and his feet were bare.

"I am Mr. Dishart. Are the soldiers already in the square, Yuill?"

"They'll be there in a minute."

The man was so weak that Gavin had to hold him.

"Be a man, Charles. You have nothing to fear. It is not such as you the soldiers have come for. If need be, I can swear that you had not the strength, even if you had the will, to join in the weavers' riot."

"For Godsake, Mr. Dishart," Yuill cried, his hands chattering on Gavin's coat, "dinna swear that. My laddie was in the thick o' the riot; and if he's ta'en there's the poors-house gaping for Kitty and me, for I couldna weave half a web a week. If there's a warrant agin onybody o' the name o' Yuill, swear it's me; swear I'm a desperate character, swear I'm michty strong for all I look palsied; and if when they take me, my courage breaks down, swear the mair, swear I confessed my guilt to you on the Book."

As Yuill spoke the quick rub-a-dub of a drum was heard.

"The soldiers!" Gavin let go his hold of the old man, who hastened away to give himself up.

"That's no the sojers," said a woman; "it's the folk gathering in the square. This 'll be a watery Sabbath in Thrums."

"Rob Dow," shouted Gavin, as Dow flung past with a scythe in his hand, "lay down that scythe."

"To hell wi' religion!" Rob retorted, fiercely; "it spoils a' thing."

"Lay down that scythe; I command you."

Rob stopped undecidedly, then cast the scythe from him, but its rattle on the stones was more than he could bear.

"I winna," he cried, and, picking it up, ran to the square.

An upper window in Bank Street opened, and Dr. McQueen put out his head. He was smoking as usual.

"Mr. Dishart," he said, "you will return

home at once if you are a wise man; or, better still, come in here. You can do nothing with these people to-night."

"I can stop their fighting."

"You will only make black blood between them and you."

"Dinna heed him, Mr. Dishart," cried some women.

"You had better heed him," cried a man.

"I will not desert my people," Gavin said.

"Listen, then, to my prescription," the doctor replied. "Drive that gypsy lassie out of the town before the soldiers reach it. She is firing the men to a red-heat through sheer devilry."

"She brocht the news, or we would have been nipped in our beds," some people cried.

"Does any one know who she is?" Gavin demanded, but all shook their heads. The Egyptian, as they called her, had never been seen in these parts before.

"Has any other person seen the soldiers?" he asked. "Perhaps this is a false alarm."

"Several have seen them within the last few minutes," the doctor answered. "They came from Tilliedrum, and were advancing on us from the south, but when they heard that we had got the alarm they stopped at the top of the brae, near T'nowhead's farm. Man, you would take these things more coolly if you smoked."

"Show me this woman," Gavin said sternly to those who had been listening. Then a stream of people carried him into the square.

The square has altered little, even in these days of enterprise, when Tillyloss has become Newton Bank, and the Craft Head Croft Terrace, with enamelled labels on them for the guidance of slow people, who forget their address and have to run to the end of the street and look up every time they write a letter. The stones on which the butter-wives sat have disappeared, and with them the clay walls and the outside stairs. Gone, too, is the

stair of the town-house, from the top of which the drummer roared the gossip of the week on Sabbaths to country folk, to the scandal of all who knew that the proper thing on that day is to keep your blinds down; but the town-house itself, round and red, still makes exit to the south troublesome. Wherever streets meet the square there is a house in the centre of them, and thus the heart of Thrums is a box, in which the stranger finds himself suddenly, wondering at first how he is to get out, and presently how he got in.

To Gavin, who never before had seen a score of people in the square at once, here was a sight strange and terrible. Andrew Struthers, an old soldier, stood on the outside stair of the town-house, shouting words of command to some fifty weavers, many of them scantily clad, but all armed with pikes and poles. Most were known to the little minister, but they wore faces that were new to him. New-comers joined the body every moment. If the drill was clumsy the

men were fierce. Hundreds of people gathered around, some screaming, some shaking their fists at the old soldier, many trying to pluck their relatives out of danger. Gavin could not see the Egyptian. Women and old men, fighting for the possession of his ear, implored him to disperse the armed band. He ran up the town-house stair, and in a moment it had become a pulpit.

"Dinna dare to interfere, Mr. Dishart," Struthers said savagely.

"Andrew Struthers," said Gavin solemnly, "in the name of God I order you to leave me alone. If you don't," he added ferociously, "I'll fling you over the stair."

"Dinna heed him, Andrew," some one shouted; and another cried, "He canna understand our sufferings; he has dinner ilka day."

Struthers faltered, however, and Gavin cast his eye over the armed men.

"Rob Dow," he said, "William Carmichael,

Thomas Whamond, William Munn, Alexander Hobbart, Henders Haggart, step forward."

These were Auld Lichts, and when they found that the minister would not take his eyes off them, they obeyed, all save Rob Dow.

"Never mind him, Rob," said the atheist, Cruickshanks, "it 's better playing cards in hell than singing psalms in heaven."

"Joseph Cruickshanks," responded Gavin grimly, "you will find no cards down there."

Then Rob also came to the foot of the stair. There was some angry muttering from the crowd, and young Charles Yuill exclaimed, "Curse you, would you lord it ower us on week-days as weel as on Sabbaths?"

"Lay down your weapons," Gavin said to the six men.

They looked at each other. Hobbart slipped his pike behind his back.

"I hae no weapon," he said slily.

"Let me hae my fling this nicht," Dow

entreated, "and I'll promise to bide sober for a twelvemonth."

"Oh, Rob, Rob!" the minister said bitterly, "are you the man I prayed with a few hours ago?"

The scythe fell from Rob's hands.

"Down wi' your pikes," he roared to his companions, "or I'll brain you wi' them."

"Ay, lay them down," the precentor whispered, "but keep your feet on them."

Then the minister, who was shaking with excitement, though he did not know it, stretched forth his arms for silence, and it came so suddenly as to frighten the people in the neighbouring streets.

"If he prays we're done for," cried young Charles Yuill, but even in that hour many of the people unbonneted.

"Oh, Thou who art the Lord of hosts," Gavin prayed, "we are in Thy hands this night. These are Thy people, and they have sinned, but Thou art a merciful God, and they were

sore tried, and knew not what they did. To Thee, our God, we turn for deliverance, for without Thee we are lost."

The little minister's prayer was heard all round the square, and many weapons were dropped as an Amen to it.

"If you fight," cried Gavin, brightening as he heard the clatter of the iron on the stones, "your wives and children may be shot in the streets. These soldiers have come for a dozen of you; will you be benefited if they take away a hundred?"

"Oh, hearken to him," cried many women.

"I winna," answered a man, "for I'm ane o' the dozen. Whaur's the Egyptian?"

"Here."

Gavin saw the crowd open, and the woman of Windyghoul come out of it, and, while he should have denounced her, he only blinked, for once more her loveliness struck him full in the eyes. She was beside him on the stair before he became a minister again.

"How dare you, woman?" he cried; but she flung a rowan berry at him.

"If I were a man," she exclaimed, addressing the people, "I wouldna let mysel be catched like a mouse in a trap."

"We winna," some answered.

"What kind o' women are you," cried the Egyptian, her face gleaming as she turned to her own sex, "that bid your men folk gang to gaol when a bold front would lead them to safety? Do you want to be husbandless and hameless?"

"Disperse, I command you!" cried Gavin. "This abandoned woman is inciting you to riot."

"Dinna heed this little man," the Egyptian retorted.

It is curious to know that even at that anxious moment Gavin winced because she called him little.

"She has the face of a mischief-maker," he shouted, "and her words are evil."

"You men and women o' Thrums," she

responded, "ken that I wish you weel by the service I hae done you this nicht. Wha telled you the sojers was coming?"

"It was you; it was you!"

"Ay, and mony a mile I ran to bring the news. Listen, and I'll tell you mair."

"She has a false tongue," Gavin cried; "listen not to the brazen woman."

"What I have to tell," she said, "is as true as what I've telled already, and how true that is you a' ken. You're wondering how the sojers has come to a stop at the tap o' the brae instead o' marching on the town. Here's the reason. They agreed to march straucht to the square if the alarm wasna given, but if it was they were to break into small bodies and surround the town so that you couldna get out. That's what they're doing now."

At this the screams were redoubled, and many men lifted the weapons they had dropped.

"Believe her not," cried Gavin. "How could a wandering gypsy know all this?"

"Ay, how can you ken?" some demanded.

"It's enough that I do ken," the Egyptian answered. "And this mair I ken, that the captain of the soldiers is confident he'll nab every one o' you that's wanted unless you do one thing."

"What is 't?"

"If you a' run different ways you're lost, but if you keep thegither you'll be able to force a road into the country, whaur you can scatter. That's what he's fleid you'll do."

"Then it's what we will do."

"It is what you will not do," Gavin said passionately. "The truth is not in this wicked woman."

But scarcely had he spoken when he knew that startling news had reached the square. A murmur arose on the skirts of the mob, and swept with the roar of the sea towards

the town-house. A detachment of the soldiers were marching down the Roods from the north.

"There's some coming frae the east-town end," was the next intelligence, "and they've gripped Sanders Webster, and auld Charles Yuill has gien himsel' up."

"You see, you see," the gypsy said, flashing triumph at Gavin.

"Lay down your weapons," Gavin cried, but his power over the people had gone.

"The Egyptian spoke true," they shouted; "dinna heed the minister."

Gavin tried to seize the gypsy by the shoulders, but she slipped past him down the stair, and crying "Follow me!" ran round the town-house and down the brae.

"Woman!" he shouted after her, but she only waved her arms scornfully. The people followed her, many of the men still grasping their weapons, but all in disorder. Within a minute after Gavin saw the gleam of the

ring on her finger, as she waved her hands, he and Dow were alone in the square.

"She's an awfu' woman that," Rob said. "I saw her lauching."

Gavin ground his teeth.

"Rob Dow," he said, slowly, "if I had not found Christ I would have throttled that woman. You saw how she flouted me?"

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE SOLDIERS MEET THE AMAZONS OF THRUMS.

Dow looked shamefacedly at the minister, and then set off up the square.

"Where are you going, Rob?"

"To gie myself up. I maun do something to let you see there's one man in Thrums that has mair faith in you than in a fliskmahoy."

"And only one, Rob. But I don't know that they want to arrest you."

"Ay, I had a hand in tying the polissman to the——"

"I want to hear nothing about that," Gavin said, quickly.

"Will I hide, then?"

"I dare not advise you to do that. It would be wrong."

Half a score of fugitives tore past the town-house, and were out of sight without a cry.

There was a tread of heavier feet, and a dozen soldiers, with several policemen and two prisoners, appeared suddenly on the north side of the square.

"Rob," cried the minister in desperation, "run!"

When the soldiers reached the town-house, where they locked up their prisoners, Dow was skulking eastward, and Gavin running down the brae.

"They're fechting," he was told, "they're fechting on the brae, the sojers is firing, a man's killed!"

But this was an exaggeration.

The brae, though short, is very steep. There is a hedge on one side of it, from which the land falls away, and on the other side a hillock. Gavin reached the scene to see the soldiers marching down the brae, guarding a small body of policemen. The armed weavers were retreating before them. A hundred women or more were on the hillock, shrieking and gesticulating.

Gavin joined them, calling on them not to fling the stones they had begun to gather.

The armed men broke into a rabble, flung down their weapons, and fled back towards the town-house. Here they almost ran against the soldiers in the square, who again forced them into the brae. Finding themselves about to be wedged between the two forces, some crawled through the hedge, where they were instantly seized by policemen. Others sought to climb up the hillock and then escape into the country. The policemen clambered after them. The men were too frightened to fight, but a woman seized a policeman by the waist and flung him head foremost among the soldiers. One of these shouted "Fire!" but the captain cried "No." Then came showers of missiles from the women. They stood their ground and defended the retreat of the scared men.

Who flung the first stone is not known, but it is believed to have been the Egyptian. The policemen were recalled, and the whole body

ordered to advance down the brae. Thus the weavers who had not escaped at once were driven before them, and soon hemmed in between the two bodies of soldiers, when they were easily captured. But for two minutes there was a thick shower of stones and clods of earth.

It was ever afterwards painful to Gavin to recall this scene, but less on account of the shower of stones than because of the flight of one divit in it. He had been watching the handsome young captain, Halliwell, riding with his men; admiring him, too, for his coolness. This coolness exasperated the gypsy, who twice flung at Halliwell and missed him. He rode on smiling contemptuously.

"Oh, if I could only fling straight!" the Egyptian moaned.

Then she saw the minister by her side, and in the tick of a clock something happened that can never be explained. For the moment Gavin was so lost in misery over the probable effect of

the night's rioting that he had forgotten where he was. Suddenly the Egyptian's beautiful face was close to his, and she pressed a divit into his hand, at the same time pointing at the officer, and whispering "Hit him."

Gavin flung the clod of earth, and hit Halliwell on the head.

I say I cannot explain this. I tell what happened, and add with thankfulness that only the Egyptian witnessed the deed. Gavin, I suppose, had flung the divit before he could stay his hand. Then he shrank in horror.

"Woman!" he cried again.

"You are a dear," she said, and vanished.

By the time Gavin was breathing freely again the lock-up was crammed with prisoners, and the Riot Act had been read from the town-house stair. It is still remembered that the baron-bailie, to whom this duty fell, had got no further than, "Victoria, by the Grace of God," when the paper was struck out of his hands.

When a stirring event occurs up here we smack our lips over it for months, and so I could still write a history of that memorable night in Thrums. I could tell how the doctor, a man whose shoulders often looked as if they had been caught in a shower of tobacco ash, brought me the news to the school-house, and how, when I crossed the fields to dumfounder Waster Lunny with it, I found Birse, the post, reeling off the story to him as fast as a fisher could let out line. I know who was the first woman on the Marywell brae to hear the horn, and how she woke her husband, and who heard it first at the Denhead and the Tenements, with what they immediately said and did. I had from Dite Deuchar's own lips the curious story of his sleeping placidly throughout the whole disturbance, and on wakening in the morning yoking to his loom as usual; and also his statement that such ill-luck was enough to shake a man's faith in religion. The police had knowledge that

enabled them to go straight to the houses of the weavers wanted, but they sometimes brought away the wrong man, for such of the people as did not escape from the town had swopped houses for the night—a trick that served them better than all their drilling on the hill. Old Yuill's son escaped by burying himself in a peat-rick, and Snecky Hobart by pretending that he was a sack of potatoes. Less fortunate was Sanders Webster, the mole-catcher already mentioned. Sanders was really an innocent man. He had not even been in Thrums on the night of the rising against the manufacturers, but thinking that the outbreak was to be left unpunished, he wanted his share in the glory of it. So he had boasted of being a ringleader until many believed him, including the authorities. His braggadocio undid him. He was run to earth in a pig-sty, and got nine months. With the other arrests I need not concern myself, for they have no part in the story of the little minister.

While Gavin was with the families whose breadwinners were now in the lock-up, a cell that was usually crammed on fair nights and empty for the rest of the year, the sheriff and Halliwell were in the round-room of the town-house, not in a good temper. They spoke loudly, and some of their words sank into the cell below.

"The whole thing has been a fiasco," the sheriff was heard saying, "owing to our failing to take them by surprise. Why, three-fourths of those taken will have to be liberated, and we have let the worst offenders slip through our hands."

"Well," answered Halliwell, who was wearing a heavy cloak, "I have brought your policemen into the place, and that is all I undertook to do."

"You brought them, but at the expense of alarming the country-side. I wish we had come without you."

"Nonsense! My men advanced like ghosts.

Could your police have come down that brae alone to-night?"

"Yes, because it would have been deserted. Your soldiers, I tell you, have done the mischief. This woman, who, so many of our prisoners admit, brought the news of our coming, must either have got it from one of your men or have seen them on the march."

"The men did not know their destination. True, she might have seen us despite our precautions, but you forget that she told them how we were to act in the event of our being seen. That is what perplexes me."

"Yes, and me too, for it was a close secret between you and me and Lord Rintoul and not half-a-dozen others."

"Well, find the woman, and we shall get the explanation. If she is still in the town she cannot escape, for my men are everywhere."

"She was seen ten minutes ago."

"Then she is ours. I say, Riach, if I were

you I would set all my prisoners free and take away a cartload of their wives instead. I have only seen the backs of the men of Thrums, but, on my word, I very nearly ran away from the women. Hallo! I believe one of your police has caught our virago single-handed."

So Halliwell exclaimed, hearing some one shout, "This is the rascal!" But it was not the Egyptian who was then thrust into the round-room. It was John Dunwoodie, looking very sly. Probably there was not, even in Thrums, a cannier man than Dunwoodie. His religious views were those of Cruickshanks, but he went regularly to church "on the off-chance of there being a God after all; so I'm safe, whatever side may be wrong."

"This is the man," explained a policeman, "who brought the alarm. He admits himself having been in Tilliedrum just before we started."

"Your name, my man?" the sheriff demanded.

"It micht be John Dunwoodie," the tinsmith answered cautiously.

"But is it?"

"I dinna say it's no."

"You were in Tilliedrum this evening?"

"I micht hae been."

"Were you?"

"I'll swear to nothing."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm a canny man."

"Into the cell with him," Halliwell cried, losing patience.

"Leave him to me," said the sheriff. "I understand the sort of man. Now, Dunwoodie, what were you doing in Tilliedrum?"

"I was taking my laddie down to be prenticed to a writer there," answered Dunwoodie, falling into the sheriff's net.

"What are you yourself?"

"I micht be a tinsmith to trade."

"And you, a mere tinsmith, dare to tell me that a lawyer was wiiling to take your

son into his office? Be cautious, Dunwoodie."

"Weel, then, the laddie's highly edicated and I hae siller, and that's how the writer was to take him and make a gentleman o' him."

"I learn from the neighbours," the policeman explained, "that this is partly true, but what makes us suspect him is this. He left the laddie at Tilliedrum, and yet when he came home the first person he sees at the fireside is the laddie himself. The laddie had run home, and the reason plainly was that he had heard of our preparations and wanted to alarm the town."

"There seems something in this, Dunwoodie," the sheriff said, "and if you cannot explain it I must keep you in custody."

"I'll make a clean breast o't," Dunwoodie replied, seeing that in this matter truth was best. "The laddie was terrible against being made a gentleman, and when he saw the kind o' life he would hae to lead, clean hands, clean

dickies, and no gutters on his breeks, his heart took mair scunner at genteelity than ever, and he ran hame. Ay, I was mad when I saw him at the fireside, but he says to me, 'How would you like to be a gentleman yoursel', father?' he says, and that so affected me 'at I'm to gie him his ain way."

Another prisoner, Dave Langlands, was confronted with Dunwoodie.

"John Dunwoodie's as innocent as I am mysel," Dave said, "and I'm most michty innocent. It wasna John but the Egyptian that gave the alarm. I tell you what, sheriff, if it'll make me innocenter-like I'll picture the Egyptian to you just as I saw her, and syne you'll be able to catch her easier."

"You are an honest fellow," said the sheriff.

"I only wish I had the whipping of him," growled Halliwell, who was of a generous nature.

"For what business had she," continued Dave righteously, "to meddle in other folks'

business? She's no a Thrums lassie, and so I say, 'Let the law take its course on her.'"

"Will you listen to such a cur, Riach?" asked Halliwell.

"Certainly. Speak out, Langlands."

"Weel, then, I was in the windmill the nicht."

"You were a watcher?"

"I happened to be in the windmill wi' another man," Dave went on, avoiding the officer's question.

"What was his name?" demanded Halliwell.

"It was the Egyptian I was to tell you about," Dave said, looking to the sheriff.

"Ah, yes, you only tell tales about women," said Halliwell.

"Strange women," corrected Dave. "Weel, we was there, and it would maybe be twal o'clock, and we was speaking (but about lawful things) when we heard some ane running yont the road. I keeked through a hole in the door,

and I saw it was an Egyptian lassie 'at I had never clapped een on afore. She saw the licht in the window, and she cried, 'Hie, you billies in the windmill, the sojers is coming!' I fell in a fricht, but the other man opened the door, and again she cries, 'The sojers is coming; quick, or you'll be ta'en.' At that the other man up wi' his bonnet and ran, but I didna make off so smart."

"You had to pick yourself up first," suggested the officer.

"Sal, it was the lassie picked me up; ay, and she picked up a horn at the same time."

"'Blaw on that,' she cried, 'and alarm the town.' But, sheriff, I didna do't. Na, I had ower muckle respect for the law."

"In other words," said Halliwell, "you also bolted, and left the gypsy to blow the horn herself."

"I dinna deny but what I made my feet my friend, but it wasna her that blew the horn. I ken that, for I looked back and saw her trying

to do't, but she couldna, she didna ken the way."

"Then who did blow it?"

"The first man she met, I suppose. We a' kent that the horn was to be the signal except Wearywarld. He's police, so we kept it frae him."

"That is all you saw of the woman?"

"Ay, for I ran straucht to my garret, and there your men took me. Can I gae hame now, sheriff?"

"No, you cannot. Describe the woman's appearance."

"She had a heap o' rowan berries stuck in her hair, and, I think, she had on a green wrapper and a red shawl. She had a most extraordinar face. I canna exact describe it, for she would be lauchin' one second and syne solemn the next. I tell you her face changed as quick as you could turn the pages o' a book. Ay, here comes Wearywarld to speak up for me."

Wearyworld entered cheerfully.

"This is the local policeman," a Tilliedrum officer said; "we have been searching for him everywhere, and only found him now."

"Where have you been?" asked the sheriff, wrathfully.

"Whaur maist honest men is at this hour," replied Wearyworld; "in my bed."

"How dared you ignore your duty at such a time?"

"It's a long story," the policeman answered, pleasantly, in anticipation of a talk at last.

"Answer me in a word."

"In a word!" cried the policeman, quite crestfallen. "It canna be done. You'll need to cross-examine me, too. It's my lawful richt."

"I'll take you to the Tilliedrum gaol for your share in this night's work if you do not speak to the purpose. Why did you not hasten to our assistance?"

"As sure as death I never kent you was

here. I was up the Roods on my rounds when I heard an awfu' din down in the square, and thinks I, there's rough characters about, and the place for honest folk is their bed. So to my bed I gaed, and I was in't when your men gripped me."

"We must see into this before we leave. In the meantime you will act as a guide to my searchers. Stop! Do you know anything of this Egyptian?"

"What Egyptian? Is't a lassie wi' rowans in her hair?"

"The same. Have you seen her?"

"That I have. There's nothing agin her, is there? Whatever it is, I'll uphaud she didna do't, for a simpler, franker-spoken crittur couldna be."

"Never mind what I want her for. When did you see her?"

"It would be about twal o'clock," began Wearyworld unctuously, "when I was in the Roods, ay, no lang afore I heard the disturbance

in the square. I was standing in the middle o' the road, wondering how the door o' the windmill was swinging open, when she came up to me.

"'A fine nicht for the time o' year,' I says to her, for nobody but the minister had spoken to me a' day.

"'A very fine nicht,' says she, very frank, though she was breathing quick like as if she had been running. 'You'll be police?' says she.

"'I am,' says I, 'and wha be you?'

"'I'm just a puir gypsy lassie,' she says.

"'And what's that in your hand?' says I.

"'It's a horn I found in the wood,' says she, 'but it's rusty and winna blaw.'

"I laughed at her ignorance, and says I, 'I warrant I could blaw it.'

"'I dinna believe you,' says she.

"'Gie me haud o't,' says I, and she gae it to me, and I blew some bonny blasts on't. Ay, you see she didna ken the way o't. 'Thank

you kindly,' says she, and she ran awa without even minding to take the horn back again."

"You incredible idiot!" cried the sheriff. "Then it was you who gave the alarm?"

"What hae I done to madden you?" honest Wearyworld asked in perplexity.

"Get out of my sight, sir!" roared the sheriff.

But the captain laughed.

"I like your doughty policeman, Riach," he said. "Hie, obliging friend, let us hear how this gypsy struck you. How was she dressed?"

"She was snod, but no unca snod," replied Wearyworld, stiffly.

"I don't understand you."

"I mean she was couthie, but no sair in order."

"What on earth is that?"

"Weel, a tasty stocky, but gey orra put on."

"What language are you speaking, you enigma?"

"I'm saying she was naturally a bonny bit kimmer rather than happit up to the nines."

"Oh, go away," cried Halliwell; whereupon Wearyworld descended the stair haughtily, declaring that the sheriff was an unreasonable man, and that he was a queer captain who did not understand the English language.

"Can I gae hame now, sheriff?" asked Langlands, hopefully.

"Take this fellow back to his cell," Riach directed, shortly, "and whatever else you do, see that you capture this woman. Halliwell, I am going out to look for her myself. Confound it, what are you laughing at?"

"At the way this vixen has slipped through your fingers."

"Not quite that, sir, not quite that. She is in Thrums still, and I swear I'll have her before day breaks. See to it, Halliwell, that

if she is brought here in my absence she does not slip through your fingers."

"If she is brought here," said Halliwell, mocking him, "you must return and protect me. It would be cruelty to leave a poor soldier in the hands of a woman of Thrums."

"She is not a Thrums woman. You have been told so a dozen times."

"Then I am not afraid."

In the round-room (which is oblong) there is a throne on which the bailie sits when he dispenses justice. It is swathed in red cloths that give it the appearance of a pulpit. Left to himself, Halliwell flung off his cloak and taking a chair near this dais rested his legs on the bare wooden table, one on each side of the lamp. He was still in this position when the door opened, and two policemen thrust the Egyptian into the room.

CHAPTER VII.

HAS THE FOLLY OF LOOKING INTO A WOMAN'S EYES BY WAY OF TEXT.

"THIS is the woman, captain," one of the policemen said in triumph, "and, begging your pardon, will you keep a grip of her till the sheriff comes back?"

Halliwell did not turn his head.

"You can leave her here," he said carelessly. "Three of us are not needed to guard a woman."

"But she's a slippery customer."

"You can go," said Halliwell; and the policemen withdrew slowly, eyeing their prisoner doubtfully until the door closed. Then the officer wheeled round languidly, expecting to find the Egyptian gaunt and muscular.

"Now then," he drawled, "why—— By Jove!"

The gallant soldier was as much taken

aback as if he had turned to find a pistol at his ear. He took his feet off the table. Yet he only saw the gypsy's girlish figure in its red and green, for she had covered her face with her hands. She was looking at him intently between her fingers, but he did not know this. All he did want to know just then was what was behind the hands.

Before he spoke again she had perhaps made up her mind about him, for she began to sob bitterly. At the same time she slipped a finger over her ring.

"Why don't you look at me?" asked Halliwell, selfishly.

"I daurna."

"Am I so fearsome?"

"You're a sojer, and you would shoot me like a craw."

Halliwell laughed, and taking her wrists in his hands, uncovered her face.

"Oh, by Jove!" he said again, but this time to himself.

As for the Egyptian, she slid the ring into her pocket, and fell back before the officer's magnificence.

"Oh," she cried, "is all sojers like you?"

There was such admiration in her eyes that it would have been self-contempt to doubt her. Yet having smiled complacently, Halliwell became uneasy.

"Who on earth are you?" he asked, finding it wise not to look her in the face. "Why do you not answer me more quickly?"

"Dinna be angry at that, captain," the Egyptian implored. "I promised my mither aye to count twenty afore I spoke, because she thocht I was ower glib. Captain, how is't that you're so fleid to look at me?"

Thus put on his mettle, Halliwell again faced her, with the result that his question changed to "Where did you get those eyes?" Then was he indignant with himself.

"What I want to know," he explained severely, "is how you were able to acquaint the

Thrums people with our movements? That you must tell me at once, for the sheriff blames my soldiers. Come now, no counting twenty!"

He was pacing the room now, and she had her face to herself. It said several things, among them that the officer evidently did not like this charge against his men.

"Does the shirra blame the sojers?" exclaimed this quick-witted Egyptian. "Weel, that cows, for he has nane to blame but himsel'."

"What!" cried Halliwell, delighted. "It was the sheriff who told tales? Answer me. You are counting a hundred this time."

Perhaps the gypsy had two reasons for withholding her answer. If so, one of them was that as the sheriff had told nothing, she had a story to make up. The other was that she wanted to strike a bargain with the officer.

"If I tell you," she said eagerly, "will you set me free?"

"I may ask the sheriff to do so."

"But he mauna see me," the Egyptian said in distress. "There's reasons, captain."

"Why, surely you have not been before him on other occasions," said Halliwell, surprised.

"No in the way you mean," muttered the gypsy, and for the moment her eyes twinkled. But the light in them went out when she remembered that the sheriff was near, and she looked desperately at the window as if ready to fling herself from it. She had very good reasons for not wishing to be seen by Riach, though fear that he would put her in gaol was not one of them.

Halliwell thought it was the one cause of her woe, and great was his desire to turn the tables on the sheriff.

"Tell me the truth," he said, "and I promise to befriend you."

"Weel, then," the gypsy said, hoping still to soften his heart, and making up her story as she told it, "yestreen I met the shirra, and he

telled me a' I hae telled the Thrums folk this nicht."

"You can scarcely expect me to believe that. Where did you meet him?"

"In Glen Quharity. He was riding on a horse."

"Well, I allow he was there yesterday, and on horseback. He was on his way back to Tilliedrum from Lord Rintoul's place. But don't tell me that he took a gypsy girl into his confidence."

"Ay, he did, without kenning. He was gieing his horse a drink when I met him, and he let me tell him his fortune. He said he would gaol me for an impostor if I didna tell him true, so I gaed about it cautiously, and after a minute or twa I telled him he was coming to Thrums the nicht to nab the rioters."

"You are trifling with me," interposed the indignant soldier. "You promised to tell me not what you said to the sheriff, but how he disclosed our movements to you."

"And that's just what I am telling you, only you hinna the rumelgumption to see it. How do you think fortunes is telled? First we get out o' the man, without his seeing what we're after, a' about himsel', and syne we repeat it to him. That's what I did wi' the shirra."

"You drew the whole thing out of him without his knowing?"

"'Deed I did, and he rode awa' saying I was a witch."

The soldier heard with the delight of a schoolboy.

"Now if the sheriff does not liberate you at my request," he said, "I will never let him hear the end of this story. He was right; you are a witch. You deceived the sheriff: yes, undoubtedly you are a witch."

He looked at her with fun in his face, but the fun disappeared, and a wondering admiration took its place.

"By Jove!" he said, "I don't wonder you

bewitched the sheriff. I must take care or you will bewitch the captain, too."

At this notion he smiled, but he also ceased looking at her. Suddenly the Egyptian again began to cry.

"You're angry wi' me," she sobbed. "I wish I had never set e'en on you."

"Why do you wish that?" Halliwell asked.

"Fine you ken," she answered, and again covered her face with her hands.

He looked at her undecidedly.

"I am not angry with you," he said, gently. "You are an extraordinary girl."

Had he really made a conquest of this beautiful creature? Her words said so, but had he? The captain could not make up his mind. He gnawed his moustache in doubt.

There was silence, save for the Egyptian's sobs. Halliwell's heart was touched, and he drew nearer her.

"My poor girl——"

He stopped. Was she crying? Was she

not laughing at him rather? He became red.

The gypsy peeped at him between her fingers, and saw that he was of two minds. She let her hands fall from her face, and undoubtedly there were tears on her cheeks.

"If you're no angry wi' me," she said, sadly, "how will you no look at me?"

"I am looking at you now."

He was very close to her, and staring into her wonderful eyes. I am older than the Captain, and those eyes have dazzled me.

"Captain dear."

She put her hand in his. His chest rose. He knew she was seeking to beguile him, but he could not take his eyes off hers. He was in a worse plight than a woman listening to the first whisper of love.

Now she was further from him, but the spell held. She reached the door, without taking her eyes from his face. For several seconds he had been as a man mesmerised.

Just in time he came to. It was when she turned from him to find the handle of the door. She was turning it when his hand fell on hers so suddenly that she screamed. He twisted her round.

"Sit down there," he said hoarsely, pointing to the chair upon which he had flung his cloak. She dared not disobey. Then he leant against the door, his back to her, for just then he wanted no one to see his face. The gypsy sat very still and a little frightened.

Halliwell opened the door presently, and called to the soldier on duty below.

"Davidson, see if you can find the sheriff. I want him. And Davidson——"

The captain paused.

"Yes," he muttered, and the old soldier marvelled at his words, "it is better. Davidson, lock this door on the outside."

Davidson did as he was ordered, and again the Egyptian was left alone with Halliwell.

"Afraid of a woman!" she said, con-

temptuously, though her heart sank when she heard the key turn in the lock.

"I admit it," he answered, calmly.

He walked up and down the room, and she sat silently watching him.

"That story of yours about the sheriff was not true," he said at last.

"I suspect it wasna," answered the Egyptian coolly. "Hae you been thinking about it a' this time? Captain, I could tell you what you're thinking now. You're wishing it had been true, so that the ane o' you couldna lauch at the other."

"Silence!" said the captain, and not another word would he speak until he heard the sheriff coming up the stair. The Egyptian trembled at his step, and rose in desperation.

"Why is the door locked?" cried the sheriff, shaking it.

"All right," answered Halliwell; "the key is on your side."

At that moment the Egyptian knocked the

lamp off the table, and the room was at once in darkness. The officer sprang at her, and catching her by the skirt, held on.

"Why are you in darkness?" asked the sheriff, as he entered.

"Shut the door," cried Halliwell. "Put your back to it."

"Don't tell me the woman has escaped?"

"I have her, I have her! She capsized the lamp, the little jade. Shut the door."

Still keeping firm hold of her, as he thought, the captain relit the lamp with his other hand. It showed an extraordinary scene. The door was shut, and the sheriff was guarding it. Halliwell was clutching the cloth of the bailie's seat. There was no Egyptian.

A moment passed before either man found his tongue.

"Open the door. After her!" cried Halliwell.

But the door would not open. The Egyptian had fled and locked it behind her.

What the two men said to each other, it would not be fitting to tell. When Davidson, who had been gossiping at the corner of the town-house, released his captain and the sheriff, the gypsy had been gone for some minutes.

"But she shan't escape us," Riach cried, and hastened out to assist in the pursuit.

Halliwell was in such a furious temper that he called up Davidson and admonished him for neglect of duty.

CHAPTER VIII.

3 A.M.—MONSTROUS AUDACITY OF THE WOMAN.

Not till the stroke of three did Gavin turn homeward, with the legs of a ploughman, and eyes rebelling against over-work. Seeking to comfort his dejected people, whose courage lay spilt on the brae, he had been in as many houses as the policemen. The soldiers marching through the wynds came frequently upon him, and found it hard to believe that he was always the same one. They told afterwards that Thrums was remarkable for the ferocity of its women, and the number of its little ministers.

The morning was nipping cold, and the streets deserted, for the people had been ordered within doors. As he crossed the Roods, Gavin saw a gleam of red-coats. In the Back wynd he heard a bugle blown. A stir in the Banker's

close spoke of another seizure. At the top of the school wynd two policemen, of whom one was Wearyworld, stopped the minister with the flash of a lantern.

"We dauredna let you pass, sir," the Tilliedrum man said, "without a good look at you. That's the orders."

"I hereby swear," said Wearyworld, authoritatively, "that this is no the Egyptian. Signed, Peter Spens, policeman, called by the vulgar, Wearyworld. Mr. Dishart, you can pass, unless you'll bide a wee and gie us your crack."

"You have not found the gypsy, then?" Gavin asked.

"No," the other policeman said, "but we ken she's within cry o' this very spot, and escape she canna."

"What mortal man can do," Wearyworld said, "we're doing: ay, and mair, but she's auld wecht, and may find bilbie in queer places. Mr. Dishart, my official opinion is

that this Egyptian is fearsomely like my snuff-spoon. I've kent me drap that spoon on the fender, and be beat to find it in an hour. And yet, a' the time I was sure it was there. This is a gey mysterious world, and women's the uncanniest things in't. It's hardly mous to think how uncanny they are."

"This one deserves to be punished," Gavin said, firmly; "she incited the people to riot."

"She did," agreed Wearyworld, who was supping ravenously on sociability; "ay, she even tried her tricks on me, so that them that kens no better thinks she fooled me. But she's cracky. To gie her her due, she's cracky, and as for her being a cuttie, you've said yoursel, Mr. Dishart, that we're all desperately wicked. But we're sair tried. Has it ever struck you that the trouts bites best on the Sabbath? God's critturs tempting decent men."

"Come alang," cried the Tilliedrum man, impatiently.

"I'm coming, but I maun give Mr. Dishart permission to pass first. Hae you heard, Mr. Dishart," Wearyworld whispered, "that the Egyptian diddled baith the captain and the shirra? It's my official opinion that she's no better than a roasted onion, the which, if you grip it firm, jumps out o' sicht, leaving its coat in your fingers. Mr. Dishart, you can pass."

The policemen turned down the school-wynd, and Gavin, who had already heard exaggerated accounts of the strange woman's escape from the town-house, proceeded along the Tenements. He walked in the black shadows of the houses, though across the way there was the morning light.

In talking of the gypsy, the little minister had, as it were, put on the black cap; but now, even though he shook his head angrily with every thought of her, the scene in Windyghoul glimmered before his eyes. Sometimes when he meant to frown he only sighed, and then having sighed he shook himself. He was unpleasantly

conscious of his right hand, which had flung the divit. Ah, she was shameless, and it would be a bright day for Thrums that saw the last of her. He hoped the policemen would succeed in——. It was the gladsomeness of innocence that he had seen dancing in the moonlight. A mere woman could not be like that. How soft——. And she had derided him; he, the Auld Licht minister of Thrums, had been flouted before his people by a hussy. She was without reverence, she knew no difference between an Auld Licht minister, whose duty it was to speak and hers to listen, and herself. This woman deserved to be——. And the look she cast behind her as she danced and sang! It was sweet, so wistful; the presence of purity had silenced him. Purity! Who had made him fling that divit? He would think no more of her. Let it suffice that he knew what she was. He would put her from his thoughts. Was it a ring on her finger?

Fifty yards in front of him Gavin saw the

road end in a wall of soldiers. They were between him and the manse, and he was still in darkness. No sound reached him, save the echo of his own feet. But was it an echo? He stopped, and turned round sharply. Now he heard nothing, he saw nothing. Yet was not that a human figure standing motionless in the shadow behind?

He walked on, and again heard the sound. Again he looked behind, but this time without stopping. The figure was following him. He stopped. So did it. He turned back, but it did not move. It was the Egyptian!

Gavin knew her, despite the lane of darkness, despite the long cloak that now concealed even her feet, despite the hood over her head. She was looking quite respectable, but he knew her.

He neither advanced to her nor retreated. Could the unhappy girl not see that she was walking into the arms of the soldiers? But doubtless she had been driven from all her

hiding-places. For a moment Gavin had it in his heart to warn her. But it was only for a moment. The next a sudden horror shot through him. She was stealing toward him, so softly that he had not seen her start. The woman had designs on him! Gavin turned from her. He walked so quickly that judges would have said he ran.

The soldiers, I have said, stood in the dim light. Gavin had almost reached them, when a little hand touched his arm.

"Stop," cried the sergeant, hearing some one approaching, and then Gavin stepped out of the darkness with the gypsy on his arm.

"It is you, Mr. Dishart," said the sergeant, "and your lady?"

"I——," said Gavin.

His lady pinched his arm.

"Yes," she answered, in an elegant English voice that made Gavin stare at her, "but, indeed, I am sorry I ventured into the streets to-night. I thought I might be able to comfort

some of these unhappy people, captain, but I could do little, sadly little."

"It is no scene for a lady, ma'am, but your husband has——. Did you speak, Mr. Dishart?"

"Yes, I must inf——"

"My dear," said the Egyptian, "I quite agree with you, so we need not detain the captain."

"I'm only a sergeant, ma'am."

"Indeed!" said the Egyptian, raising her pretty eyebrows, "and how long are you to remain in Thrums, sergeant?"

"Only for a few hours, Mrs. Dishart. If this gypsy lassie had not given us so much trouble, we might have been gone by now."

"Ah, yes, I hope you will catch her, sergeant."

"Sergeant," said Gavin, firmly, "I must——"

"You must, indeed, dear," said the Egyptian, "for you are sadly tired. Good-night, sergeant."

"Your servant, Mrs. Dishart. Your servant, sir."

"But——," cried Gavin.

"Come, love," said the Egyptian, and she walked the distracted minister through the soldiers and up the manse road.

The soldiers left behind, Gavin flung her arm from him, and, standing still, shook his fist in her face.

"You—you—woman!" he said.

This, I think, was the last time he called her a woman.

But she was clapping her hands merrily.

"It was beautiful!" she exclaimed.

"It was iniquitous!" he answered. "And I a minister!"

"You can't help that," said the Egyptian, who pitied all ministers heartily.

"No," Gavin said, misunderstanding her, "I could not help it. No blame attaches to me."

"I meant that you could not help being a

minister. You could have helped saving me, and I thank you so much."

"Do not dare to thank me. I forbid you to say that I saved you. I did my best to hand you over to the authorities."

"Then why did you not hand me over?"

Gavin groaned.

"All you had to say," continued the merciless Egyptian, "was, 'This is the person you are in search of.' I did not have my hand over your mouth. Why did you not say it?"

"Forbear!" said Gavin, woefully.

"It must have been," the gypsy said, "because you really wanted to help me."

"Then it was against my better judgment," said Gavin.

"I am glad of that," said the gypsy. "Mr. Dishart, I do believe you like me all the time."

"Can a man like a woman against his will?" Gavin blurted out.

"Of course he can," said the Egyptian,

speaking as one who knew. "That is the very nicest way to be liked."

Seeing how agitated Gavin was, remorse filled her, and she said in a wheedling voice—

"It is all over, and no one will know."

Passion sat on the minister's brow, but he said nothing, for the gypsy's face had changed with her voice, and the audacious woman was become a child.

"I am very sorry," she said, as if he had caught her stealing jam. The hood had fallen back, and she looked pleadingly at him. She had the appearance of one who was entirely in his hands.

There was a torrent of words in Gavin, but only these trickled forth—

"I don't understand you."

"You are not angry any more?" pleaded the Egyptian.

"Angry!" he cried, with the righteous rage of one who when his leg is being sawn off is asked gently if it hurts him.

"I know you are," she sighed, and the sigh meant that men are strange.

"Have you no respect for law and order?" demanded Gavin.

"Not much," she answered, honestly.

He looked down the road to where the red-coats were still visible, and his face became hard. She read his thoughts.

"No," she said, becoming a woman again, "it is not yet too late. Why don't you shout to them?"

She was holding herself like a queen, but there was no stiffness in her. They might have been a pair of lovers, and she the wronged one. Again she looked timidly at him, and became beautiful in a new way. Her eyes said that he was very cruel, and she was only keeping back her tears till he had gone. More dangerous than her face was her manner, which gave Gavin the privilege of making her unhappy; it permitted him to argue with her; it never implied that though he raged at her

he must stand afar off; it called him a bully, but did not end the conversation.

Now (but perhaps I should not tell this) unless she is his wife a man is shot with a thrill of exultation every time a pretty woman allows him to upbraid her.

"I do not understand you," Gavin repeated weakly, and the gypsy bent her head under this terrible charge.

"Only a few hours ago," he continued, "you were a gypsy girl in a fantastic dress, barefooted——"

The Egyptian's bare foot at once peeped out mischievously from beneath the cloak, then again retired into hiding.

"You spoke as broadly," complained the minister, somewhat taken aback by this apparition, "as any woman in Thrums, and now you fling a cloak over your shoulders, and immediately become a fine lady. Who are you?"

"Perhaps," answered the Egyptian, "it is

the cloak that has bewitched me." She slipped out of it. "Ay, ay, ou losh!" she said, as if surprised, "it was just the cloak that did it, for now I'm a puir ignorant bit lassie again. My, certie, but claithes does make a differ to a woman!"

This was sheer levity, and Gavin walked scornfully away from it.

"Yet, if you will not tell me who you are," he said, looking over his shoulder, "tell me where you got the cloak."

"Na faags," replied the gypsy out of the cloak. "Really, Mr. Dishart, you had better not ask," she added, replacing it over her.

She followed him, meaning to gain the open by the fields to the north of the manse.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand, "if you are not to give me up."

"I am not a policeman," replied Gavin, but he would not take her hand.

"Surely, we part friends, then?" said the Egyptian, sweetly.

"No," Gavin answered. "I hope never to see your face again."

"I cannot help," the Egyptian said, with dignity, "your not liking my face." Then, with less dignity, she added, "There is a splotch of mud on your own, little minister; it came off the divit you flung at the captain."

With this parting shot she tripped past him, and Gavin would not let his eyes follow her. It was not the mud on his face that distressed him, nor even the hand that had flung the divit. It was the word "little." Though even Margaret was not aware of it, Gavin's shortness had grieved him all his life. There had been times when he tried to keep the secret from himself. In his boyhood he had sought a remedy by getting his larger comrades to stretch him. In the company of tall men he was always self-conscious. In the pulpit he looked darkly at his congregation when he asked them who, by taking thought, could add a cubit to his stature. When

standing on a hearthrug his heels were frequently on the fender. In his bedroom he has stood on a footstool and surveyed himself in the mirror. Once he fastened high heels to his boots, being ashamed to ask Hendry Munn to do it for him; but this dishonesty shamed him, and he tore them off. So the Egyptian had put a needle into his pride, and he walked to the manse gloomily.

Margaret was at her window, looking for him, and he saw her though she did not see him. He was stepping into the middle of the road to wave his hand to her, when some sudden weakness made him look towards the fields instead. The Egyptian saw him and nodded thanks for his interest in her, but he scowled and pretended to be studying the sky. Next moment he saw her running back to him.

"There are soldiers at the top of the field," she cried. "I cannot escape that way."

"There is no other way," Gavin answered.

"Will you not help me again?" she entreated.

She should not have said "again." Gavin shook his head, but pulled her closer to the manse dyke, for his mother was still in sight.

"Why do you do that?" the girl asked, quickly, looking round to see if she were pursued. "Oh, I see," she said, as her eyes fell on the figure at the window.

"It is my mother," Gavin said, though he need not have explained, unless he wanted the gypsy to know that he was a bachelor.

"Only your mother?"

"Only! Let me tell you she may suffer more than you for your behaviour to-night!"

"How can she!"

"If you are caught, will it not be discovered that I helped you to escape?"

"But you said you did not."

"Yes, I helped you," Gavin admitted.

"My God! what would my congregation say if they knew I had let you pass yourself off as—as my wife?"

He struck his brow, and the Egyptian had the propriety to blush.

"It is not the punishment from men I am afraid of," Gavin said, bitterly, "but from my conscience. No, that is not true. I do fear exposure, but for my mother's sake. Look at her; she is happy, because she thinks me good and true; she has had such trials as you cannot know of, and now, when at last I seemed able to do something for her, you destroy her happiness. You have her life in your hands."

The Egyptian turned her back upon him, and one of her feet tapped angrily on the dry ground. Then, child of impulse as she always was, she flashed an indignant glance at him, and walked quickly down the road.

"Where are you going?" he cried.

"To give myself up. You need not be alarmed; I will clear you."

There was not a shake in her voice, and she spoke without looking back.

"Stop!" Gavin called, but she would not, until his hand touched her shoulder.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"Why—" whispered Gavin, giddily, "why—why do you not hide in the manse garden?—No one will look for you there."

There were genuine tears in the gypsy's eyes now.

"You are a good man," she said; "I like you."

"Don't say that," Gavin cried in horror. "There is a summer-seat in the garden."

Then he hurried from her, and without looking to see if she took his advice, hastened to the manse. Once inside, he snibbed the door.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WOMAN CONSIDERED IN ABSENCE — ADVENTURES OF A MILITARY CLOAK.

About six o'clock Margaret sat up suddenly in bed, with the conviction that she had slept in. To her this was to ravel the day: a dire thing. The last time it happened Gavin, softened by her distress, had condensed morning worship into a sentence that she might make up on the clock.

Her part on waking was merely to ring her bell, and so rouse Jean, for Margaret had given Gavin a promise to breakfast in bed, and remain there till her fire was lit. Accustomed all her life, however, to early rising, her feet were usually on the floor before she remembered her vow, and then it was but a step to the window to survey the morning. To Margaret, who seldom went out, the weather was not of great moment, while it mattered much to Gavin, yet she always thought of it the first thing, and he

not at all until he had to decide whether his companion should be an umbrella or a staff.

On this morning Margaret only noticed that there had been rain since Gavin came in. Forgetting that the water obscuring the outlook was on the other side of the panes she tried to brush it away with her fist. It was of the soldiers she was thinking. They might have been awaiting her appearance at the window as their signal to depart, for hardly had she raised the blind when they began their march out of Thrums. From the manse she could not see them, but she heard them, and she saw some people at the Tenements run to their houses at sound of the drum. Other persons, less timid, followed the enemy with execrations half-way to Tilliedrum. Margaret, the only person, as it happened, then awake in the manse, stood listening for some time. In the summer-seat of the garden, however, there was another listener protected from her sight by thin spars.

Despite the lateness of the hour Margaret

was too soft-hearted to rouse Jean, who had lain down in her clothes, trembling for her father. She went instead into Gavin's room to look admiringly at him as he slept. Often Gavin woke to find that his mother had slipped in to save him the enormous trouble of opening a drawer for a clean collar, or of pouring the water into the basin with his own hand. Sometimes he caught her in the act of putting thick socks in the place of thin ones, and it must be admitted that her passion for keeping his belongings in boxes, and the boxes in secret places, and the secret places at the back of drawers, occasionally led to their being lost when wanted. "They are safe, at any rate, for I put them away some gait," was then Margaret's comfort, but less soothing to Gavin. Yet if he upbraided her in his hurry, it was to repent bitterly his temper the next, and to feel its effects more than she, temper being a weapon that we hold by the blade. When he awoke and saw her in his room he would pre-

tend, unless he felt called upon to rage at her for self-neglect, to be still asleep, and then be filled with tenderness for her. A great writer has spoken sadly of the shock it would be to a mother to know her boy as he really is, but I think she often knows him better than he is known to cynical friends. We should be slower to think that the man at his worst is the real man, and certain that the better we are ourselves the less likely is he to be at his worst in our company. Every time he talks away his own character before us he is signifying contempt for ours.

On this morning Margaret only opened Gavin's door to stand and look, for she was fearful of awakening him after his heavy night. Even before she saw that he still slept she noticed with surprise that, for the first time since he came to Thrums, he had put on his shutters. She concluded that he had done this lest the light should rouse him. He was not sleeping pleasantly, for now he put his open hand before

his face, as if to guard himself, and again he frowned and seemed to draw back from something. He pointed his finger sternly to the north, ordering the weavers, his mother thought, to return to their homes, and then he muttered to himself so that she heard the words, "And if thy right hand offend thee cut it off, and cast it from thee, for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." Then suddenly he bent forward, his eyes open and fixed on the window. Thus he sat, for the space of half a minute, like one listening with painful intentness. When he lay back Margaret slipped away. She knew he was living the night over again, but not of the divit his right hand had cast, nor of the woman in the garden.

Gavin was roused presently by the sound of voices from Margaret's room, where Jean, who had now gathered much news, was giving it to her mistress. Jean's cheerfulness would have told him that her father was safe had he

not wakened to thoughts of the Egyptian. I suppose he was at the window in an instant, unsnibbling the shutters and looking out as cautiously as a burglar might have looked in. The Egyptian was gone from the summer-seat. He drew a great breath.

But his troubles were not over. He had just lifted his ewer of water when these words from the kitchen capsized it:—

"Ay, an Egyptian. That's what the auld folk call a gypsy. Weel, Mrs. Dishart, she led police and sojers sic a dance through Thrums as would baffle description, though I kent the fits and fors o't as I dinna. Ay, but they gripped her in the end, and the queer thing is——"

Gavin listened to no more. He suddenly sat down. The queer thing, of course, was that she had been caught in his garden. Yes, and doubtless queerer things about this hussy and her "husband" were being bawled from door to door. To the girl's probable sufferings

he gave no heed. What kind of man had he been a few hours ago to yield to the machinations of a woman who was so obviously the devil? Now he saw his folly in the face.

The tray in Jean's hands clattered against the dresser, and Gavin sprang from his chair. He thought it was his elders at the front door.

In the parlour he found Margaret sorrowing for those whose mates had been torn from them, and Jean with a face flushed by talk. On ordinary occasions the majesty of the minister still cowed Jean, so that she could only gaze at him without shaking when in church, and then because she wore a veil. In the manse he was for taking a glance at sideways and then going away comforted, as a respectable woman may once or twice in a day look at her brooch in the pasteboard box as a means of helping her with her work. But with such a to-do in Thrums, and she the possessor of exclusive information, Jean's

reverence for Gavin only took her to-day as far as the door, where she lingered half in the parlour and half in the lobby, her eyes turned politely from the minister, but her ears his entirely.

"I thought I heard Jean telling you about the capture of the—of an Egyptian woman," Gavin said to his mother, nervously.

"Did you cry to me?" Jean asked, turning round longingly. "But maybe the mistress will tell you about the Egyptian hersel'."

"Has she been taken to Tilliedrum?" Gavin asked in a hollow voice.

"Sup up your porridge, Gavin," Margaret said. "I'll have no speaking about this terrible night till you've eaten something."

"I have no appetite," the minister replied, pushing his plate from him. "Jean, answer me."

"'Deed, then," said Jean willingly, "they hinna ta'en her to Tilliedrum."

"For what reason?" asked Gavin, his dread increasing.

"For the reason that they couldna catch her," Jean answered. "She spirited hersel awa', the magerful crittur."

"What! But I heard you say——"

"Ay, they had her aince, but they couldna keep her. It's like a witch story. They had her safe in the town-house, and baith shirra and captain guarding her, and syne in a clink she wasna there. A' nicht they looked for her, but she hadna left so muckle as a foot-print ahint her, and in the tail of the day they had to up wi' their tap in their lap and march awa without her."

Gavin's appetite returned.

"Has she been seen since the soldiers went away?" he asked, laying down his spoon with a new fear. "Where is she now?"

"No human eye has seen her," Jean answered impressively. "Whaur is she now? Whaur does the flies vanish to in winter? We ken they're some gait, but whaur?"

"But what are the people saying about her?"

"Daft things," said Jean. "Old Charles Yuill gangs the length o' hinting that she's dead and buried."

"She could not have buried herself, Jean," Margaret said, mildly.

"I dinna ken. Charles says she's even capable o' that."

Then Jean retired reluctantly (but leaving the door ajar) and Gavin fell to on his porridge. He was now so cheerful that Margaret wondered.

"If half the stories about this gypsy be true," she said, "she must be more than a mere woman."

"Less, you mean, mother," Gavin said, with conviction. "She is a woman, and a sinful one."

"Did you see her Gavin?"

"I saw her. Mother, she flouted me!"

"The daring tawpie!" exclaimed Margaret.

"She is all that," said the minister.

"Was she dressed just like an ordinary gypsy body? But you don't notice clothes much, Gavin."

"I noticed hers," Gavin said, slowly, "she was in green and red, I think, and barefooted."

"Ay," shouted Jean from the kitchen, startling both of them, "but she had a lang grey-like cloak too. She was seen jouking up closes in't."

Gavin rose, considerably annoyed, and shut the parlour door.

"Was she as bonny as folks say?" asked Margaret. "Jean says they speak of her beauty as unearthly."

"Beauty of her kind," Gavin explained learnedly, "is neither earthly nor heavenly." He was seeing things as they are very clearly now. "What," he said "is mere physical beauty? Pooh!"

"And yet," said Margaret, "the soul surely does speak through the face to some extent."

"Do you really think so, mother?" Gavin asked, a little uneasily.

"I have always noticed it," Margaret said, and then her son sighed.

"But I would let no face influence me a jot," he said, recovering.

"Ah, Gavin, I'm thinking I'm the reason you pay so little regard to women's faces. It's no natural."

"You've spoilt me, you see, mother, for ever caring for another woman. I would compare her to you, and then where would she be?"

"Sometime," Margaret said, "you'll think differently."

"Never," answered Gavin, with a violence that ended the conversation.

Soon afterwards he set off for the town, and in passing down the garden walk cast a guilty glance at the summer-seat. Something black was lying in one corner of it. He stopped irresolutely, for his mother was nodding to him

from her window. Then he disappeared into the little arbour. What had caught his eye was a Bible. On the previous day, as he now remembered, he had been called away while studying in the garden, and had left his Bible on the summer-seat, a pencil between its pages. Not often probably had the Egyptian passed a night in such company.

But what was this? Gavin had not to ask himself the question. The gypsy's cloak was lying neatly folded at the other end of the seat. Why had the woman not taken it with her? Hardly had he put this question when another stood in front of it. What was to be done with the cloak? He dared not leave it there for Jean to discover. He could not take it into the manse in daylight. Beneath the seat was a tool-chest without a lid, and into this he crammed the cloak. Then, having turned the box face downwards he went about his duties. But many a time during the day he shivered to the marrow, reflecting suddenly that at this

very moment Jean might be carrying the accursed thing (at arms' length, like a dog in disgrace) to his mother

Now let those who think that Gavin has not yet paid toll for taking the road with the Egyptian, follow the adventures of the cloak. Shortly after gloaming fell that night Jean encountered her master in the lobby of the manse. He was carrying something, and when he saw her he slipped it behind his back. Had he passed her openly she would have suspected nothing, but this made her look at him.

"Why do you stare so, Jean?" Gavin asked, conscience-stricken, and he stood with his back to the wall until she had retired in bewilderment.

"I have noticed her watching me sharply all day," he said to himself, though it was only he who had been watching her.

Gavin carried the cloak to his bedroom, thinking to lock it away in his chest, but it looked so wicked lying there that he seemed to see it after the lid was shut.

The garret was the best place for it. He took it out of the chest and was opening his door gently, when there was Jean again. She had been employed very innocently in his mother's room, but he said tartly—

"Jean, I really cannot have this," which sent Jean to the kitchen with her apron at her eyes.

Gavin stowed the cloak beneath the garret bed, and an hour afterwards was engaged on his sermon, when he distinctly heard some one in the garret. He ran up the ladder with a terrible brow for Jean, but it was not Jean; it was Margaret.

"Mother," he said in alarm, "what are you doing here?"

"I am only tidying up the garret, Gavin."

"Yes, but—it is too cold for you. Did Jean —did Jean ask you to come up here?"

"Jean? She knows her place better."

Gavin took Margaret down to the parlour, but his confidence in the garret had gone. He

stole up the ladder again, dragged the cloak from its lurking place, and took it into the garden. He very nearly met Jean in the lobby again, but hearing him coming she fled precipitately, which he thought very suspicious.

In the garden he dug a hole, and there buried the cloak, but even now he was not done with it. He was wakened early by a noise of scraping in the garden, and his first thought was "Jean!" But peering from the window, he saw that the resurrectionist was a dog, which already had its teeth in the cloak.

That forenoon Gavin left the manse unostentatiously, carrying a brown-paper parcel. He proceeded to the hill, and having dropped the parcel there, retired hurriedly. On his way home, nevertheless, he was overtaken by D. Fittis, who had been cutting down whins. Fittis had seen the parcel fall, and running after Gavin, returned it to him. Gavin thanked

D. Fittis, and then sat down gloomily on the cemetery dyke. Half an hour afterwards he flung the parcel into a Tillyloss garden.

In the evening Margaret had news for him, got from Jean.

"Do you remember, Gavin, that the Egyptian every one is still speaking of, wore a long cloak? Well, would you believe it, the cloak was Captain Halliwell's, and she took it from the town-house when she escaped. She is supposed to have worn it inside out. He did not discover that it was gone until he was leaving Thrums."

"Mother, is this possible?" Gavin said.

"The policeman, Wearyworld, has told it. He was ordered, it seems, to look for the cloak quietly, and to take any one into custody in whose possession it was found.

"Has it been found?"

"No."

The minister walked out of the parlour, for he could not trust his face. What was to

be done now? The cloak was lying in mason Baxter's garden, and Baxter was therefore, in all probability, within four-and-twenty hours of the Tilliedrum gaol.

"Does Mr. Dishart ever wear a cap at nichts?" Femie Wilkie asked Sam'l Fairweather three hours later.

"Na, na, he has ower muckle respect for his lum hat," answered Sam'l; "and richtly, for it's the crowning stone o' the edifice."

"Then it couldna hae been him I met at the back o' Tillyloss the now," said Femie, "though like him it was. He joukit back when he saw me."

While Femie was telling her story in the Tenements, mason Baxter, standing at the window which looked into his garden, was shouting, "Wha's that in my yard?" There was no answer, and Baxter closed his window, under the impression that he had been speaking to a cat. The man in the cap then emerged from the corner where he had been crouching,

and stealthily felt for something among the cabbages and pea sticks. It was no longer there, however, and by-and-by he retired empty-handed.

"The Egyptian's cloak has been found," Margaret was able to tell Gavin next day. "Mason Baxter found it yesterday afternoon."

"In his garden?" Gavin asked hurriedly.

"No; in the quarry, he says, but according to Jean he is known not to have been at the quarry to-day. Some seem to think that the gypsy gave him the cloak for helping her to escape, and that he has delivered it up lest he should get into difficulties."

"Whom has he given it to, mother?" Gavin asked.

"To the policeman."

"And has Wearyworld sent it back to Halliwell?"

"Yes. He told Jean he sent it off at once, with the information that the masons had found it in the quarry."

The next day was Sabbath, when a new trial, now to be told, awaited Gavin in the pulpit; but it had nothing to do with the cloak, of which I may here record the end. Wearyworld had not forwarded it to its owner; Meggy, his wife, took care of that. It made its reappearance in Thrums, several months after the riot, as two pairs of Sabbath breeks for her sons, James and Andrew.

CHAPTER X.

FIRST SERMON AGAINST WOMEN.

On the afternoon of the following Sabbath, as I have said, something strange happened in the Auld Licht pulpit. The congregation, despite their troubles, turned it over and peered at it for days, but had they seen into the inside of it they would have weaved few webs until the session had sat on the minister. The affair baffled me at the time, and for the Egyptian's sake I would avoid mentioning it now, were it not one of Gavin's milestones. It includes the first of his memorable sermons against Woman.

I was not in the Auld Licht church that day, but I heard of the sermon before night, and this, I think, is as good an opportunity as another for showing how the gossip about Gavin reached me up here in the Glen school-house.

Since Margaret and her son came to the manse I had kept the vow made to myself and avoided Thrums. Only once had I ventured to the kirk, and then, instead of taking my old seat, the fourth from the pulpit, I sat down near the plate, where I could look at Margaret without her seeing me. To spare her that agony I even stole away as the last word of the benediction was pronounced, and my haste scandalised many, for with Auld Lichts it is not customary to retire quickly from church after the manner of the godless U.P.'s (and the Free Kirk is little better), who have their hats in their hand when they rise for the benediction, so that they may at once pour out like a burst dam. We resume our seats, look straight before us, clear our throats and stretch out our hands for our womenfolk to put our hats into them. In time we do get out, but I am never sure how.

One may gossip in a glen on Sabbaths, though not in a town, without losing his character, and I used to await the return of my

neighbour, the farmer of Waster Lunny, and of Silva Birse, the Glen Quharity post, at the end of the school-house path. Waster Lunny was a man whose care in his leisure hours was to keep from his wife his great pride in her. His horse, Catlaw, on the other hand, he told outright what he thought of it, praising it to its face and blackguarding it as it deserved, and I have seen him, when completely baffled by the brute, sit down before it on a stone and thus harangue: "You think you're clever, Catlaw, my lass, but you're mista'en. You're a thrawn limmer, that's what you are. You think you have blood in you. You hae blood! Gae away, and dinna blether. I tell you what, Catlaw, I met a man yestreen that kent your mither, and he says she was a feikie fushionless besom. What do you say to that?"

As for the post, I will say no more of him than that his bitter topic was the unreasonableness of humanity, which treated him graciously when he had a letter for it, but scowled at him

when he had none, "aye implying that I hae a letter, but keep it back."

On the Sabbath evening after the riot, I stood at the usual place awaiting my friends, and saw before they reached me that they had something untoward to tell. The farmer, his wife and three children, holding each other's hands, stretched across the road. Birse was a little behind, but a conversation was being kept up by shouting. All were walking the Sabbath pace, and the family having started half a minute in advance, the post had not yet made up on them.

"It's sitting to snaw," Waster Lunny said, drawing near, and just as I was to reply "It is so," Silva slipped in the words before me.

"You wasna at the kirk," was Elspeth's salutation. I had been at the Glen church, but did not contradict her, for it is Established, and so neither here nor there. I was anxious, too, to know what their long faces meant, and so asked at once—

"Was Mr. Dishart on the riot?"

"Forenoon, ay; afternoon, no," replied Waster Lunny, walking round his wife to get nearer me. "Dominie, a queery thing happened in the kirk this day, sic as——"

"Waster Lunny," interrupted Elspeth sharply; "have you on your Sabbath shoon or have you no on your Sabbath shoon?"

"Guid care you took I should hae the dagont oncanny things on," retorted the farmer.

"Keep out o' the gutter, then," said Elspeth, "on the Lord's day."

"Him," said her man, "that is forced by a foolish woman to wear genteel 'lastic-sided boots canna forget them till he takes them aff. Whaur's the extra reverence in wearing shoon twa sizes ower sma?"

"It mayna be mair reverent," suggested Birse, to whom Elspeth's kitchen was a pleasant place, "but it's grand, and you canna expect to be baith grand and comfortable."

I reminded them that they were speaking of Mr. Dishart.

"We was saying," began the post briskly, "that——"

"It was me that was saying it," said Waster Lunny. "So, Dominie——"

"Haud your gabs, baith o' you," interrupted Elspeth. "You've been roaring the story to ane another till you're hoarse."

"In the forenoon," Waster Lunny went on determinedly, "Mr. Dishart preached on the riot, and fine he was. Oh, dominie, you should hae heard him ladling it on to Lang Tammas, no by name but in sic a way that there was no mistaking wha he was preaching at. Sal! oh losh! Tammas got it strong."

"But he's dull in the uptake," broke in the post, "by what I expected. I spoke to him after the sermon, and I says, just to see if he was properly humbled, 'Ay, Tammas,' I says, 'them that discourse was preached against, winna think themselves seven feet men for a

while again.' 'Ay, Birse,' he answers, 'and glad I am to hear you admit it, for he had you in his eye.' I was fair scunnered at Tammas the day."

"Mr. Dishart was preaching at the whole clan-jamfray o' you," said Elspeth.

"Maybe he was," said her husband, leering; "but you needna cast it at us, for, my certie, if the men got it frae him in the forenoon, the women got it in the afternoon."

"He redd them up most michty," said the post. "Thae was his very words or something like them. 'Adam,' says he, 'was an erring man, but aside Eve he was respectable.'"

"Ay, but it wasna a' women he meant," Elspeth explained, "for when he said that, he pointed his finger direct at T'nowhead's lassie, and I hope it'll do her good."

"But I wonder," I said, "that Mr. Dishart chose such a subject to-day. I thought he would be on the riot at both services."

"You'll wonder mair," said Elspeth, "when

you hear what happened afore he began the afternoon sermon. But I canna get in a word wi' that man o' mine."

"We've been speaking about it," said Birse, "ever since we left the kirk door. Tod, we've been sawing it like seed a' alang the glen."

"And we meant to tell you about it at once," said Waster Lunny; "but there's aye so muckle to say about a minister. Dagont, to hae ane keeps a body out o' langour. Ay, but this breaks the drum. Dominie, either Mr. Dishart wasna weel, or he was in the devil's grip."

This startled me, for the farmer was looking serious.

"He was weel eneuch," said Birse, "for a heap o' fowk spiered at Jean if he had ta'en his porridge as usual, and she admitted he had. But the lassie was skeered hersel', and said it was a mercy Mrs. Dishart wasna in the kirk."

"Why was she not there?" I asked anxiously.

"Oh, he winna let her out in sic weather."

"I wish you would tell me what happened," I said to Elspeth.

"So I will," she answered, "if Waster Lunny would haud his wheest for a minute. You see the afternoon diet began in the ordinary way, and a' was richt until we came to the sermon. 'You will find my text,' he says, in his piercing voice, 'in the eighth chapter of Ezra.'"

"And at thae words," said Waster Lunny, "my heart gae a loup, for Ezra is an unca ill book to find; ay, and so is Ruth."

"I kent the books o' the Bible by heart," said Elspeth, scornfully, "when I was a sax year auld."

"So did I," said Waster Lunny, "and I ken them yet, except when I'm hurried. When Mr. Dishart gave out Ezra he a sort o' keeked round the kirk to find out if he

had puzzled onybody, and so there was a kind o' a competition among the congregation wha would lay hand on it first. That was what doited me. Ay, there was Ruth when she wasna wanted, but Ezra, dagont, it looked as if Ezra had jumped clean out o' the Bible."

"You wasna the only distressed crittur," said his wife. "I was ashamed to see Eppie McLaren looking up the order o' the books at the beginning o' the Bible."

"Tibbie Birse was even mair brazen," said the post, "for the sly cuttie opened at Kings and pretended it was Ezra."

"None o' thae things would I do," said Waster Lunny, "and sal, I dauredna, for Davit Lunan was glowering over my shuther. Ay, you may scowl at me, Elspeth Proctor, but as far back as I can mind, Ezra has done me. Mony a time afore I start for the kirk I take my Bible to a quiet place and look Ezra up. In the very pew I says canny to mysel', 'Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job,' the

which should be a help, but the moment the minister gi'es out that awfu' book, away goes Ezra like the Egyptian."

"And you after her," said Elspeth, "like the weavers that wouldna fecht. You make a windmill of your Bible."

"Oh, I winna admit I'm beat. Never mind, there's queer things in the world forby Ezra. How is cripples aye so puffed up mair than other folk? How does flour-bread aye fall on the buttered side?"

"I will mind," Elspeth said, "for I was terrified the minister would admonish you frae the pulpit."

"He couldna hae done that, for was he no baffled to find Ezra himsel'?"

"Him no find Ezra!" cried Elspeth. "I hae telled you a dozen times he found it as easy as you could yoke a horse."

"The thing can be explained in no other way," said her husband, doggedly, "if he was weel and in sound mind."

"Maybe the dominie can clear it up," suggested the post, "him being a scholar."

"Then tell me what happened," I asked.

"Godsake, hae we no telled you?" Birse said. "I thocht we had."

"It was a terrible scene," said Elspeth, giving her husband a shove. "As I said, Mr. Dishart gave out Ezra eighth. Weel, I turned it up in a jiffy, and syne looked cautiously to see how Eppie McLaren was getting on. Just at that minute I heard a groan frae the pulpit. It didna stop short o' a groan. Ay, you may be sure I looked quick at the minister, and there I saw a sicht that would hae made the grandest gape. His face was as white as a baker's, and he had a sort of fallen against the back o' the pulpit, staring demented-like at his open Bible."

"And I saw him," said Birse, "put up his hand atween him and the Book, as if he thocht it was to jump at him."

"Twice," said Elspeth, "he tried to speak, and twice he let the words fall."

"That," says Waster Lunny, "the whole congregation admits, but I didna see it mysel', for a' this time you may picture me hunting savage-like for Ezra. I thocht the minister was waiting till I found it."

"Hendry Munn," said Birse, "stood upon one leg, wondering whether he should run to the session-house for a glass of water."

"But by that time," said Elspeth, "the fit had left Mr. Dishart, or rather it had ta'en a new turn. He grew red, and it's gospel that he stamped his foot."

"He had the face of one using bad words," said the post. "He didna swear, of course, but that was the face he had on."

"I missed it," said Waster Lunny, "for I was in full cry after Ezra, with the sweat running down my face."

"But the most astounding thing has yet to be telled," went on Elspeth. "The minister shook himsel' like one wakening frae a nasty dream, and he cries in a voice of thunder,

just as if he was shaking his fist at somebody——"

"He cries," Birse interposed, cleverly, "he cries, 'You will find the text in Genesis, chapter three, verse six.'"

"Yes," said Elspeth, "first he gave out one text, and then he gave out another, being the most amazing thing to my mind that ever happened in the town of Thrums. What will our children's children think o't? I wouldna hae missed it for a pound note."

"Nor me," said Waster Lunny, "though I only got the tail o't. Dominie, no sooner had he said Genesis third and sixth, than I laid my finger on Ezra. Was it no provoking? Onybody can turn up Genesis, but it needs an able-bodied man to find Ezra."

"He preached on the Fall," Elspeth said, "for an hour and twenty-five minutes, but powerful though he was I would rather he had telled us what made him gie the go-by to Ezra."

"All I can say," said Waster Lunny, "is that I never heard him mair awe-inspiring. Whaur has he got sic a knowledge of women? He riddled them, he fair riddled them, till I was ashamed o' being married."

"It's easy kent whaur he got his knowledge of women," Birse explained, "it's a' in the original Hebrew. You can howk ony mortal thing out o' the original Hebrew, the which all ministers hae at their finger ends. What else makes them ken to jump a verse now and then when giving out a psalm?"

"It wasna women like me he denounced," Elspeth insisted, "but young lassies that leads men astray wi' their abominable wheedling ways."

"Tod," said her husband, "if they try their hands on Mr. Dishart they'll meet their match."

"They will," chuckled the post. "The Hebrew's a grand thing, though teuch, I'm telled, michty teuch."

"His sublimest burst," Waster Lunny came back to tell me, "was about the beauty o' the soul being everything and the beauty o' the face no worth a snuff. What a scorn he has for bonny faces and toom souls! I dinna deny but what a bonny face fell takes me, but Mr. Dishart wouldna gie a blade o' grass for't. Ay, and I used to think that in their foolishness about women there was dagont little differ atween the unlearned and the highly edicated."

The gossip about Gavin brought hitherto to the school-house had been as bread to me, but this I did not like. For a minister to behave thus was as unsettling to us as a change of Government to Londoners, and I decided to give my scholars a holiday on the morrow and tramp into the town for fuller news. But all through the night it snowed, and next day, and then intermittently for many days, and every fall took the school miles farther away from Thrums. Birse and the crows had now the glen road to themselves, and even Birse had

twice or thrice to bed with me. At these times had he not been so interested in describing his progress through the snow, maintaining that the crying want of our glen road was palings for postmen to kick their feet against, he must have wondered why I always turned the talk to the Auld Licht minister.

"Ony explanation o' his sudden change o' texts?" Birse said, repeating my question. "Tod, and there is and to spare, for I hear tell there's saxteen explanations in the Tenements alone. As Tammas Haggart says, that's a blessing, for if there had just been twa explanations the kirk micht hae split on them."

"Ay," he said at another time, "twa or three even dared to question the minister, but I'm thinking they made nothing o't. The majority agrees that he was just inspired to change his text. But Lang Tammas is dour. Tammas telled the session a queer thing. He says that after the diet o' worship on that eventful afternoon Mr. Dishart carried the

Bible out o' the pulpit instead o' leaving that duty as usual to the kirk-officer. Weel, Tammas, being precentor, has a richt, as you ken, to leave the kirk by the session-house door, just like the minister himsel'. He did so that afternoon, and what, think you, did he see? He saw Mr. Dishart tearing a page out o' the Bible, and flinging it savagely into the session-house fire. You dinna credit it? Weel, it's staggering, but there's Hendry Munn's evidence too. Hendry took his first chance o' looking up Ezra in the minister's Bible, and, behold, the page wi' the eighth chapter was gone. Them that thinks Tammas wasna blind wi' excitement hauds it had been Ezra eighth that gaed into the fire. Onyway, there's no doubt about the page's being missing, for whatever excitement Tammas was in, Hendry was as cool as ever."

A week later Birse told me that the congregation had decided to regard the incident as adding lustre to their kirk. This was largely,

I fear, because it could then be used to belittle the Established minister. That fervent Auld Licht, Snecky Hobart, feeling that Gavin's action was unsound, had gone on the following Sabbath to the parish kirk and sat under Mr. Duthie. But Mr. Duthie was a close reader, so that Snecky flung himself about in his pew in misery. The minister concluded his sermon with these words: "But on this subject I will say no more at present." "Because you canna," Snecky roared, and strutted out of the church. Comparing the two scenes, it is obvious that the Auld Lichts had won a victory. After preaching impromptu for an hour and twenty-five minutes, it could never be said of Gavin that he needed to read. He became more popular than ever. Yet the change of texts was not forgotten. If in the future any other indictments were brought against him, it would certainly be pinned to them.

I marvelled long over Gavin's jump from Ezra to Genesis, and at this his first philippic

against woman, but I have known the cause for many a year. The Bible was the one that had lain on the summer-seat while the Egyptian hid there. It was the great pulpit Bible which remains in the church as a rule, but Gavin had taken it home the previous day to make some of its loose pages secure with paste. He had studied from it on the day preceding the riot, but had used a small Bible during the rest of the week. When he turned in the pulpit to Ezra, where he had left the large Bible open in the summer-seat, he found this scrawled across chapter eight:—

"I will never tell who flung the clod at Captain Halliwell. But why did you fling it? I will never tell that you allowed me to be called Mrs. Dishart before witnesses. But is not this a Scotch marriage? Signed, Babbie the Egyptian."

CHAPTER XI.

TELLS IN A WHISPER OF MAN'S FALL DURING THE CURLING SEASON.

No snow could be seen in Thrums by the beginning of the year, though clods of it lay in Waster Lunny's fields, where his hens wandered all day as if looking for something they had dropped. A black frost had set in, and one walking on the glen road could imagine that through the cracks in it he saw a loch glistening. From my door I could hear the roar of curling stones at Rathie-bog, which is almost four miles nearer Thrums. On the day I am recalling, I see that I only made one entry in my diary, "At last bought Waster Lunny's bantams." Well do I remember the transaction, and no wonder, for I had all but bought the bantams every day for a six months.

About noon the doctor's dog-cart was observed by all the Tenements standing at the Auld Licht manse. The various surmises were wrong. Margaret had not been suddenly taken ill; Jean had not swallowed a darning-needle; the minister had not walked out at his study window in a moment of sublime thought. Gavin stepped into the dog-cart, which at once drove off in the direction of Rathie-bog, but equally in error were those who said that the doctor was making a curler of him.

There was, however, ground for gossip; for Thrums folk seldom called in a doctor until it was too late to cure them, and McQueen was not the man to pay social visits. Of his skill we knew fearsome stories, as that, by looking at Archie Allardyce, who had come to broken bones on a ladder, he discovered which rung Archie fell from. When he entered a stuffy room he would poke his staff through the window to let in fresh air,

and then fling down a shilling to pay for the breakage. He was deaf in the right ear, and therefore usually took the left side of prosy people, thus, as he explained, making a blessing of an affliction. "A pity I don't hear better?" I have heard him say. "Not at all. If my misfortune, as you call it, were to be removed, you can't conceive how I should miss my deaf ear." He was a fine fellow, though brusque, and I never saw him without his pipe until two days before we buried him, which was five-and-twenty years ago come Martinmas.

"We're all quite weel," Jean said apprehensively as she answered his knock on the manse door, and she tried to be pleasant, too, for well she knew that, if a doctor willed it, she could have fever in five minutes.

"Ay, Jean, I'll soon alter that," he replied ferociously. "Is the master in?"

"He's at his sermon," Jean said with importance.

To interrupt the minister at such a moment seemed sacrilege to her, for her up-bringing had been good. Her mother had once fainted in the church, but though the family's distress was great, they neither bore her out, nor signed to the kirk-officer to bring water. They propped her up in the pew in a respectful attitude, joining in the singing meanwhile, and she recovered in time to look up 2nd Chronicles, 21st and 7th.

"Tell him I want to speak to him at the door," said the doctor fiercely, "or I'll bleed you this minute."

McQueen would not enter, because his horse might have seized the opportunity to return stablewards. At the houses where it was accustomed to stop, it drew up of its own accord, knowing where the Doctor's "cases" were as well as himself, but it resented new patients.

"You like misery, I think, Mr. Dishart," McQueen said when Gavin came to him, "at least I am always finding you in the thick of it,

and that is why I am here now. I have a rare job for you if you will jump into the machine. You know Nanny Webster, who lives on the edge of Windyghoul? No, you don't, for she belongs to the other kirk. Well, at all events, you knew her brother, Sanders, the mole-catcher?"

"I remember him. You mean the man who boasted so much about seeing a ball at Lord Rintoul's place?"

"The same, and, as you may know, his boasting about maltreating policemen whom he never saw led to his being sentenced to nine months in gaol lately."

"That is the man," said Gavin. "I never liked him."

"No, but his sister did," McQueen answered, drily, "and with reason, for he was her bread-winner, and now she is starving."

"Anything I can give her——"

"Would be too little, sir."

"But the neighbours——"

"She has few near her, and though the

Thrums poor help each other bravely, they are at present nigh as needy as herself. Nanny is coming to the poorhouse, Mr. Dishart."

"God help her!" exclaimed Gavin.

"Nonsense," said the doctor, trying to make himself a hard man. "She will be properly looked after there, and—and in time she will like it."

"Don't let my mother hear you speaking of taking an old woman to that place," Gavin said, looking anxiously up the stair. I cannot pretend that Margaret never listened.

"You all speak as if the poorhouse was a gaol," the doctor said testily. "But so far as Nanny is concerned, everthing is arranged. I promised to drive her to the poorhouse to-day, and she is waiting for me now. Don't look at me as if I was a brute. She is to take some of her things with her to the poorhouse, and the rest is to be left until Sanders's return, when

she may rejoin him. At least we said that to her to comfort her."

"You want me to go with you?"

"Yes, though I warn you it may be a distressing scene; indeed, the truth is that I am loth to face Nanny alone to-day. Mr. Duthie should have accompanied me, for the Websters are Established Kirk; ay, and so he would if Rashie-bog had not been bearing. A terrible snare this curling, Mr. Dishart"—here the doctor sighed—"I have known Mr. Duthie wait until midnight struck on Sabbath and then be off to Rashie-bog with a torch."

"I will go with you," Gavin said, putting on his coat.

"Jump in then. You won't smoke? I never see a respectable man not smoking, sir, but I feel indignant with him for such sheer waste of time."

Gavin smiled at this, and Snecky Hobart, who happened to be keeking over the manse dyke, bore the news to the Tenements.

"I'll no sleep the nicht," Snecky said, "for wondering what made the minister lauch. Ay, it would be no trifle."

A minister, it is certain, who wore a smile on his face would never have been called to the Auld Licht kirk, for life is a wrestle with the devil, and only the frivolous think to throw him without taking off their coats. Yet, though Gavin's zeal was what the congregation reverenced, many loved him privately for his boyishness. He could unbend at marriages, of which he had six on the last day of the year, and at every one of them he joked (the same joke) like a layman. Some did not approve of his playing at the teetotum for ten minutes with Kitty Dundas's invalid son, but the way Kitty boasted about it would have disgusted anybody. At the present day there are probably a score of Gavins in Thrums, all called after the little minister, and there is one Gavinia, whom he hesitated to christen. He made humorous remarks (the same remark) about all these children, and his

smile as he patted their heads was for thinking over when one's work was done for the day.

The doctor's horse clattered up the Backwynd noisily, as if a minister behind made no difference to it. Instead of climbing the Roods, however, the nearest way to Nanny's, it went westward, which Gavin, in a reverie, did not notice. The truth must be told. The Egyptian was again in his head.

"Have I fallen deaf in the left ear, too?" said the doctor. "I see your lips moving, but I don't catch a syllable."

Gavin started, coloured, and flung the gypsy out of the trap.

"Why are we not going up the Roods?" he asked.

"Well," said the doctor slowly, "at the top of the Roods there is a stance for circuses, and this old beast of mine won't pass it. You know, unless you are behind in the clashes and clavers of Thrums, that I bought her from the manager of a travelling show. She was the horse

('Lightning' they called her) that galloped round the ring at a mile an hour, and so at the top of the Roods she is still unmanageable. She once dragged me to the scene of her former triumphs, and went revolving round it, dragging the machine after her."

"If you had not explained that," said Gavin, "I might have thought that you wanted to pass by Rashie-bog."

The doctor, indeed, was already standing up to catch a first glimpse of the curlers.

"Well," he admitted, "I might have managed to pass the circus ring, though what I have told you is true. However, I have not come this way merely to see how the match is going. I want to shame Mr. Duthie for neglecting his duty. It will help me to do mine, for the Lord knows I am finding it hard, with the music of these stones in my ears."

"I never saw it played before," Gavin said, standing up in his turn. "What a din they make! McQueen, I believe they are fighting!"

"No, no," said the excited doctor, "they are just a bit daft. That's the proper spirit for the game. Look, that's the baron bailie near standing on his head, and there's Mr. Duthie off his head a' thegither. Yon's twa weavers and a mason cursing the laird, and the man wi' the besom is the Master of Crunnathie."

"A democracy, at all events," said Gavin.

"By no means," said the doctor, "it's an aristocracy of intellect. Gee up, Lightning, or the frost will be gone before we are there."

"It is my opinion, doctor," said Gavin, "that you will have bones to set before that game is finished. I can see nothing but legs now."

"Don't say a word against curling, sir, to me," said McQueen, whom the sight of a game in which he must not play had turned crusty. "Dangerous! It's the best medicine I know of. Look at that man coming across the field. It is Jo Strachan. Well, sir, curling saved Jo's life after I had given him up. You don't

believe me? Hie, Jo, Jo Strachan, come here and tell the minister how curling put you on your legs again."

Strachan came forward, a tough, little, wizened man, with red flannel round his ears to keep out the cold.

"It's gospel what the doctor says, Mr. Dishart," he declared. "Me and my brither Sandy was baith ill, and in the same bed, and the doctor had hopes o' Sandy, but nane o' me. Ay, weel, when I heard that, I thocht I micht as weel die on the ice as in my bed, so I up and on wi' my claethes. Sandy was mad at me, for he was no curler, and he says, 'Jo Strachan, if you gang to Rashie-bog you'll assuredly be brocht hame a corp.' I didna heed him, though, and off I gaed."

"And I see you did not die," said Gavin.

"Not me," answered the fish cadger, with a grin. "Na, but the joke o't is, it was Sandy that died."

"Not the joke, Jo," corrected the doctor, "the moral."

"Ay, the moral; I'm aye forgetting the word."

McQueen, enjoying Gavin's discomfiture, turned Lightning down the Rashie-bog road, which would be impassable as soon as the thaw came. In summer Rashie-bog is several fields in which a cart does not sink unless it stands still, but in winter it is a loch with here and there a spring where dead men are said to lie. There are no rushes at its east end, and here the dog-cart drew up near the curlers, a crowd of men dancing, screaming, shaking their fists and sweeping, while half a hundred onlookers got in their way, gesticulating and advising.

"Hold me tight," the doctor whispered to Gavin, "or I'll be leaving you to drive Nanny to the poorhouse by yourself."

He had no sooner said this than he tried to jump out of the trap.

"You donnert fule, John Robbie," he

shouted to a player, "soop her up, man, soop her up; no, no, dinna, dinna; leave her alane. Bailie, leave her alane, you blazing idiot. Mr. Dishart, let me go; what do you mean, sir, by hanging on to my coat tails? Dang it all, Duthie's winning. He has it, he has it!"

"You're to play, doctor?" some cried, running to the dog-cart. "We hae missed you sair."

"Jeames, I—I—. No, I daurna."

"Then we get our licks. I never saw the minister in sic form. We can do nothing against him."

"Then," cried McQueen, "I'll play. Come what will, I'll play. Let go my tails, Mr. Dishart, or I'll cut them off. Duty? Fiddlesticks!"

"Shame on you, sir," said Gavin; "yes, and on you others who would entice him from his duty."

"Shame!" the doctor cried. "Look at

Mr. Duthie. Is he ashamed? And yet that man has been reproving me for a twelvemonths because I've refused to become one of his elders. Duthie," he shouted, "think shame of yourself for curling this day."

Mr. Duthie had carefully turned his back to the trap, for Gavin's presence in it annoyed him. We seldom care to be reminded of our duty by seeing another do it. Now, however, he advanced to the dog-cart, taking the far side of Gavin.

"Put on your coat, Mr. Duthie," said the doctor, "and come with me to Nanny Webster's. You promised."

Mr. Duthie looked quizzically at Gavin, and then at the sky.

"The thaw may come at any moment," he said.

"I think the frost is to hold," said Gavin.

"It may hold over to-morrow," Mr. Duthie admitted; "but to-morrow's the Sabbath, and so a lost day."

"A what?" exclaimed Gavin, horrified.

"I only mean," Mr. Duthie answered, colouring, "that we can't curl on the Lord's day. As for what it may be like on Monday, no one can say. No, doctor, I won't risk it. We're in the middle of a game, man."

Gavin looked very grave.

"I see what you are thinking, Mr. Dishart," the old minister said doggedly; "but then, you don't curl. You are very wise. I have forbidden my sons to curl."

"Then you openly snap your fingers at your duty, Mr. Duthie?" said the doctor, loftily. ("You can let go my tails now, Mr. Dishart, for the madness has passed.")

"None of your virtuous airs, McQueen," said Mr. Duthie, hotly. "What was the name of the doctor that warned women never to have bairns while it was hauding?"

"And what," retorted McQueen, "was the name of the minister that told his session he would neither preach nor pray while the black frost lasted?"

"Hoots, doctor," said Duthie, "don't lose your temper because I'm in such form."

"Don't lose yours, Duthie, because I aye beat you."

"You beat me, McQueen! Go home, sir, and don't talk havers. Who beat you at——"

"Who made you sing small at——"

"Who won——"

"Who——"

"Who——"

"I'll play you on Monday for whatever you like!" shrieked the doctor.

"If it holds," cried the minister, "I'll be here the whole day. Name the stakes yourself. A stone?"

"No," the doctor said, "but I'll tell you what we'll play for. You've been dinging me doited about that eldership, and we'll play for't. If you win I accept office."

"Done," said the minister, recklessly.

The dog-cart was now turned toward Windy-

ghoul, its driver once more good-humoured, but Gavin silent.

"You would have been the better of my deaf ear just now, Mr. Dishart," McQueen said after the loch had been left behind. "Aye, and I'm thinking my pipe would soothe you. But don't take it so much to heart, man. I'll lick him easily. He's a decent man, the minister, but vain of his play, ridiculously vain. However, I think the sight of you, in the place that should have been his, has broken his nerve for this day, and our side may win yet."

"I believe," Gavin said, with sudden enlightenment, "that you brought me here for that purpose."

"Maybe," chuckled the doctor; "maybe." Then he changed the subject suddenly. "Mr. Dishart," he asked, "were you ever in love?"

"Never!" answered Gavin violently.

"Well, well," said the doctor, "don't terrify the horse. I have been in love myself. It's bad, but it's nothing to curling."

CHAPTER XII.

TRAGEDY OF A MUD HOUSE.

The dog-cart bumped between the trees of Caddam, flinging Gavin and the doctor at each other as a wheel rose on some beech-root or sank for a moment in a pool. I suppose the wood was a pretty sight that day, the pines only white where they had met the snow, as if the numbed painter had left his work unfinished, the brittle twigs snapping overhead, the water as black as tar. But it matters little what the wood was like. Within a squirrel's leap of it an old woman was standing at the door of a mud house, listening for the approach of the trap that was to take her to the poorhouse. Can you think of the beauty of the day now?

Nanny was not crying. She had redd up her house for the last time and put on her

black merino. Her mouth was wide open while she listened. If you had addressed her you would have thought her polite and stupid. Look at her. A flabby-faced woman she is now, with a swollen body, and no one has heeded her much these thirty years. I can tell you something; it is almost droll. Nanny Webster was once a gay flirt, and in Airlie Square there is a weaver with an unsteady head who thought all the earth of her. His loom has taken a foot from his stature, and gone are Nanny's raven locks on which he used to place his adoring hand. Down in Airlie Square he is weaving for his life, and here is Nanny, ripe for the poor-house, and between them is the hill where they were lovers. That is all the story save that when Nanny heard the dog-cart she screamed.

No neighbour was with her. If you think this hard, it is because you do not understand. Perhaps Nanny had never been very lovable except to one man, and him, it is said, she lost through her own vanity; but there was much

in her to like. The neighbours, of whom there were two not a hundred yards away, would have been with her now but they feared to hurt her feelings. No heart opens to sympathy without letting in delicacy, and these poor people knew that Nanny would not like them to see her being taken away. For a week they had been aware of what was coming, and they had been most kind to her, but that hideous word, the poorhouse, they had not uttered. Poorhouse is not to be spoken in Thrums, though it is nothing to tell a man that you see death in his face. Did Nanny think they knew where she was going? was a question they whispered to each other, and her suffering eyes cut scars on their hearts. So now that the hour had come they called their children into their houses and pulled down their blinds.

"If you would like to see her by yourself," the doctor said eagerly to Gavin, as the horse drew up at Nanny's gate, "I'll wait with the

horse. Not," he added, hastily, "that I feel sorry for her. We are doing her a kindness."

They dismounted together, however, and Nanny, who had run from the trap into the house, watched them from her window.

McQueen saw her and said glumly, "I should have come alone, for if you pray she is sure to break down. Mr. Dishart, could you not pray cheerfully?"

"You don't look very cheerful yourself," Gavin said sadly.

"Nonsense," answered the doctor. "I have no patience with this false sentiment. Stand still, Lightning, and be thankful you are not your master to-day."

The door stood open, and Nanny was crouching against the opposite wall of the room, such a poor, dull kitchen, that you would have thought the furniture had still to be brought into it. The blanket and the piece of old carpet that was Nanny's coverlet were already

packed in her box. The plate rack was empty. Only the round table and the two chairs, and the stools and some pans were being left behind.

"Well, Nanny," the doctor said, trying to bluster, "I have come, and you see Mr. Dishart is with me."

Nanny rose bravely. She knew the doctor was good to her, and she wanted to thank him. I have not seen a great deal of the world myself, but often the sweet politeness of the aged poor has struck me as beautiful. Nanny dropped a curtsey, an ungainly one maybe, but it was an old woman giving the best she had.

"Thank you kindly, sirs," she said; and then two pairs of eyes dropped before hers.

"Please to take a chair," she added timidly. It is strange to know that at that awful moment, for let none tell me it was less than awful, the old woman was the one who could speak.

Both men sat down, for they would have hurt Nanny by remaining standing. Some ministers would have known the right thing to say to her, but Gavin dared not let himself speak. I have again to remind you that he was only one-and-twenty.

"I'm drouthy, Nanny," the doctor said, to give her something to do, "and I would be obliged for a drink of water."

Nanny hastened to the pan that stood behind her door, but stopped before she reached it.

"It's toom," she said, "I—I didna think I needed to fill it this morning." She caught the doctor's eye, and could only half restrain a sob. "I couldna help that," she said, apologetically. "I'm richt angry at myself for being so ungrateful like."

The doctor thought it best that they should depart at once. He rose.

"Oh, no, doctor," cried Nanny in alarm.

"But you are ready?"

"Ay," she said, "I have been ready this twa hours, but you micht wait a minute. Hendry Munn and Andrew Allardyce is coming yont the road, and they would see me."

"Wait, doctor," Gavin said.

"Thank you kindly, sir," answered Nanny.

"But Nanny," the doctor said, "you must remember what I told you about the poo—, about the place you are going to. It is a fine house, and you will be very happy in it."

"Ay, I'll be happy in't," Nanny faltered, "but, doctor, if I could just hae bidden on here though I wasna happy!"

"Think of the food you will get; broth nearly every day."

"It—it'll be terrible enjoyable," Nanny said.

"And there will be pleasant company for you always," continued the doctor, "and a nice room to sit in. Why, after you have been there a week, you won't be the same woman."

"That's it!" cried Nanny with sudden passion. "Na, na; I'll be a woman on the

poor's rates. Oh, mither, mither, you little thocht when you bore me that I would come to this!"

"Nanny," the doctor said, rising again, "I am ashamed of you."

"I humbly speir your forgiveness, sir," she said, "and you micht bide just a wee yet. I've been ready to gang these twa hours, but now that the machine is at the gate, I dinna ken how it is, but I'm terrible sweer to come awa'. Oh, Mr. Dishart, it's richt true what the doctor says about the—the place, but I canna just take it in. I'm—I'm gey auld."

"You will often get out to see your friends," was all Gavin could say.

"Na, na, na," she cried, "dinna say that; I'll gang, but you mauna bid me ever come out, except in a hearse. Dinna let onybody in Thrums look on my face again."

"We must go," said the doctor firmly. "Put on your mutch, Nancy."

"I dinna need to put on a mutch," she

answered, with a faint flush of pride. "I have a bonnet."

She took the bonnet from her bed, and put it on slowly.

"Are you sure there's naebody looking?" she asked.

The doctor glanced at the minister, and Gavin rose.

"Let us pray," he said, and the three went down on their knees.

It was not the custom of Auld Licht ministers to leave any house without offering up a prayer in it, and to us it always seemed that when Gavin prayed, he was at the knees of God. The little minister pouring himself out in prayer in a humble room, with awed people around him who knew much more of the world than he, his voice at times thick and again a squeal, and his hands clasped not gracefully, may have been only a comic figure, but we were old-fashioned, and he seemed to make us better men. If I only knew the way, I would draw

him as he was, and not fear to make him too mean a man for you to read about. He had not been long in Thrums before he knew that we talked much of his prayers, and that doubtless puffed him up a little. Sometimes, I daresay, he rose from his knees feeling that he had prayed well to-day, which is a dreadful charge to bring against anyone. But it was not always so, nor was it so now.

I am not speaking harshly of this man, whom I have loved beyond all others, when I say that Nanny came between him and his prayer. Had he been of God's own image, unstained, he would have forgotten all else in his Maker's presence, but Nanny was speaking too, and her words choked his. At first she only whispered, but soon what was eating her heart burst out painfully, and she did not know that the minister had stopped. They were such moans as these that brought him back to earth :—

"I'll hae to gang . . . I'm a base

woman no' to be mair thankfu' to them that is so good to me . . . I dinna like to prig wi' them to take a roundabout road, and I'm sair fleid a' the Roods will see me . . . If it could just be said to poor Sanders when he comes back that I died hurriedly, syne he would be able to haud up his head . . . Oh, mither! . . . I wish terrible they had come and ta'en me at nicht . . . It's a dog-cart, and I was praying it micht be a cart, so that they could cover me wi' straw."

"This is more than I can stand," the doctor cried.

Nanny rose frightened.

"I've tried you, sair," she said, "but, oh, I'm grateful, and I'm ready now."

They all advanced toward the door without another word, and Nanny even tried to smile. But in the middle of the floor something came over her, and she stood there. Gavin took her hand, and it was cold. She looked from one to the other, her mouth opening and shutting.

"I canna help it," she said.

"It's cruel hard," muttered the doctor. "I knew this woman when she was a lassie."

The little minister stretched out his hands.

"Have pity on her, O God!" he prayed, with the presumptuousness of youth.

Nanny heard the words.

"Oh, God," she cried, "you micht!"

God needs no minister to tell Him what to do, but it was His will that the poorhouse should not have this woman. He made use of a strange instrument, no other than the Egyptian, who now opened the mud house door.

CHAPTER XIII.

SECOND COMING OF THE EGYPTIAN WOMAN.

The gypsy had been passing the house, perhaps on her way to Thrums for gossip, and it was only curiosity, born suddenly of Gavin's cry, that made her enter. On finding herself in unexpected company she retained hold of the door, and to the amazed minister she seemed for a moment to have stepped into the mud house from his garden. Her eyes danced, however, as they recognised him, and then he hardened. "This is no place for you," he was saying fiercely, when Nanny, too distraught to think, fell crying at the Egyptian's feet.

"They are taking me to the poorhouse," she sobbed; "dinna let them, dinna let them."

The Egyptian's arms clasped her, and the Egyptian kissed a sallow cheek that had once been as fair as yours, madam, who may

read this story. No one had caressed Nanny for many years, but do you think she was too poor and old to care for those young arms around her neck? There are those who say that women cannot love each other, but it is not true. Woman is not undeveloped man, but something better, and Gavin and the doctor knew it as they saw Nanny clinging to her protector. When the gypsy turned with flashing eyes to the two men she might have been a mother guarding her child.

"How dare you!" she cried, stamping her foot; and they quaked like malefactors.

"You don't see——" Gavin began, but her indignation stopped him.

"You coward!" she said.

Even the doctor had been impressed, so that he now addressed the gypsy respectfully.

"This is all very well," he said, "but a woman's sympathy——"

"A woman!—ah, if I could be a man for only five minutes!"

She clenched her little fists, and again turned to Nanny.

"You poor dear," she said tenderly, "I won't let them take you away."

She looked triumphantly at both minister and doctor, as one who had foiled them in their cruel designs.

"Go!" she said, pointing grandly to the door.

"Is this the Egyptian of the riots," the doctor said in a low voice to Gavin, "or is she a queen? Hoots, man, don't look so shamefaced. We are not criminals. Say something."

Then to the Egyptian Gavin said firmly—

"You mean well, but you are doing this poor woman a cruelty in holding out hopes to her that cannot be realised. Sympathy is not meal and bedclothes, and these are what she needs."

"And you who live in luxury," retorted the girl, "would send her to the poorhouse for them. I thought better of you!"

"Tuts!" said the doctor, losing patience,

"Mr. Dishart gives more than any other man in Thrums to the poor, and he is not to be preached to by a gypsy. We are waiting for you, Nanny."

"Ay, I'm coming," said Nanny, leaving the Egyptian. "I'll hae to gang, lassie. Dinna greet for me."

But the Egyptian said, "No, you are not going. It is these men who are going. Go, sirs, and leave us."

"And you will provide for Nanny?" asked the doctor contemptuously.

"Yes."

"And where is the siller to come from?"

"That is my affair, and Nanny's. Begone, both of you. She shall never want again. See how the very mention of your going brings back life to her face."

"I won't begone," the doctor said roughly, "till I see the colour of your siller."

"Oh, the money," said the Egyptian scornfully. She put her hand into her pocket

confidently, as if used to well-filled purses, but could only draw out two silver pieces.

"I had forgotten," she said aloud, though speaking to herself.

"I thought so," said the cynical doctor. "Come, Nanny."

"You presume to doubt me!" the Egyptian said, blocking his way to the door.

"How could I presume to believe you?" he answered. "You are a beggar by profession, and yet talk as if——pooh, nonsense."

"I would live on terrible little," Nanny whispered, "and Sanders will be out again in August month."

"Seven shillings a week," rapped out the doctor.

"Is that all?" the Egyptian asked. "She shall have it."

"When?"

"At once. No, it is not possible to-night, but to-morrow I will bring five pounds; no, I will send it; no, you must come for it."

"And where, O daughter of Dives, do you reside?" the doctor asked.

No doubt the Egyptian could have found a ready answer had her pity for Nanny been less sincere; as it was, she hesitated, wanting to propitiate the doctor, while holding her secret fast.

"I only asked," McQueen said, eyeing her curiously, "because when I make an appointment I like to know where it is to be held. But I suppose you are suddenly to rise out of the ground as you have done to-day, and did six weeks ago."

"Whether I rise out of the ground or not," the gypsy said, keeping her temper with an effort, "there will be a five-pound note in my hand. You will meet me to-morrow about this hour at—say the Kaims of Cushie?"

"No," said the doctor after a moment's pause; "I won't. Even if I went to the Kaims I should not find you there. Why can you not come to me?"

"Why do you carry a woman's hair,"

replied the Egyptian, "in that locket on your chain?"

Whether she was speaking of what she knew, or this was only a chance shot, I cannot tell, but the doctor stepped back from her hastily, and could not help looking down at the locket.

"Yes," said the Egyptian calmly, "it is still shut; but why do you sometimes open it at nights?"

"Lassie," the old doctor cried, "are you a witch?"

"Perhaps," she said; "but I ask for no answer to my questions. If you have your secrets, why may I not have mine? Now will you meet me at the Kaims?"

"No; I distrust you more than ever. Even if you came, it would be to play with me as you have done already. How can a vagrant have five pounds in her pocket when she does not have five shillings on her back?"

"You are a cruel, hard man," the Egyptian

said, beginning to lose hope. "But, see," she cried, brightening, "look at this ring. Do you know its value?"

She held up her finger, but the stone would not live in the dull light.

"I see it is gold," the doctor said cautiously, and she smiled at the ignorance that made him look only at the frame.

"Certainly it is gold," said Gavin, equally stupid.

"Mercy on us!" Nanny cried; "I believe it's what they call a diamond."

"How did you come by it?" the doctor asked suspiciously.

"I thought we had agreed not to ask each other questions," the Egyptian answered drily. "But, see, I will give it to you to hold in hostage. If I am not at the Kaims to get it back you can keep it."

The doctor took the ring in his hand and examined it curiously.

"There is a quirk in this," he said at last,

"that I don't like. Take back your ring, lassie. Mr. Dishart, give Nanny your arm, and I'll carry her box to the machine."

Now all this time Gavin had been in the dire distress of a man possessed of two minds, of which one said, "This is a true woman," and the other, "Remember the seventeenth of October." They were at war within him, and he knew that he must take a side, yet no sooner had he cast one out than he invited it back. He did not answer the doctor.

"Unless," McQueen said, nettled by his hesitation, "you trust this woman's word."

Gavin tried honestly to weigh those two minds against each other, but could not prevent impulse jumping into one of the scales.

"You do trust me," the Egyptian said, with wet eyes; and now that he looked on her again—

"Yes," he said firmly, "I trust you," and the words that had been so difficult to say were the right words. He had no more doubt of it.

"Just think a moment first," the doctor

warned him. "I decline to have anything to do with this matter. You will go to the Kaims for the siller?"

"If it is necessary," said Gavin.

"It is necessary," the Egyptian said.

"Then I will go."

Nanny took his hand timidly, and would have kissed it had he been less than a minister.

"You dare not, man," the doctor said gruffly, "make an appointment with this gypsy. Think of what will be said in Thrums."

I honour Gavin for the way in which he took this warning. For him, who was watched from the rising of his congregation to their lying down, whose every movement was expected to be a text to Thrums, it was no small thing that he had promised. This he knew, but he only reddened because the doctor had implied an offensive thing in a woman's presence.

"You forget yourself, doctor," he said sharply.

"Send some one in your place," advised the doctor, who liked the little minister.

"He must come himself and alone," said the Egyptian. "You must both give me your promise not to mention who is Nanny's friend, and she must promise too."

"Well," said the doctor, buttoning up his coat, "I cannot keep my horse freezing any longer. Remember, Mr. Dishart, you take the sole responsibility of this."

"I do," said Gavin, "and with the utmost confidence."

"Give him the ring then, lassie," said McQueen.

She handed the minister the ring, but he would not take it.

"I have your word," he said; "that is sufficient."

Then the Egyptian gave him the first look that he could think of afterwards without misgivings.

"So be it," said the doctor. "Get the money, and I will say nothing about it, unless I have reason to think that it has been dis-

honestly come by. Don't look so frightened at me, Nanny. I hope for your sake that her stocking-foot is full of gold."

"Surely it's worth risking," Nanny said, not very brightly, "when the minister's on her side."

"Ay, but on whose side, Nanny?" asked the doctor. "Lassie, I bear you no grudge; will you not tell me who you are?"

"Only a puir gypsy, your honour," said the girl, becoming mischievous now that she had gained her point; "only a wandering hallen-shaker, and will I tell you your fortune my pretty gentleman?"

"No, you shan't," replied the doctor, plunging his hands so hastily into his pockets that Gavin laughed.

"I don't need to look at your hand," said the gypsy, "I can read your fortune in your face."

She looked at him fixedly, so that he fidgeted.

"I see you," said the Egyptian in a sepul-

chral voice, and speaking slowly, "become very frail. Your eyesight has almost gone. You are sitting alone in a cauld room, cooking your ain dinner ower a feeble fire. The soot is falling down the lum. Your bearish manners towards women have driven the servant lassie frae your house, and your wife beats you."

"Ay, you spoil your prophecy there," the doctor said, considerably relieved, "for I'm not married; my pipe's the only wife I ever had."

"You will be married by that time," continued the Egyptian, frowning at this interruption, "for I see your wife. She is a shrew. She marries you in your dotage. She lauchs at you in company. She doesna allow you to smoke."

"Away with you, you jade," cried the doctor in a fury, and feeling nervously for his pipe. "Mr. Dishart, you had better stay and arrange this matter as you choose, but I want a word with you outside."

"And you're no angry wi' me, doctor, are you?" asked Nanny wistfully. "You've been

richt good to me, but I canna thole the thocht o' that place. And, oh, doctor, you winna tell naebody that I was so near taen to it?"

In the garden McQueen said to Gavin—

"You may be right, Mr. Dishart, in this matter, for there is this in our favour, that the woman can gain nothing by tricking us. She did seem to feel for Nanny. But who can she be? You saw she could put on and off the Scotch tongue as easily as if it were a cap."

"She is as much a mystery to me as to you," Gavin answered, "but she will give me the money, and that is all I ask of her."

"Ay, that remains to be seen. But take care of yourself; a man's second childhood begins when a woman gets hold of him."

"Don't alarm yourself about me, doctor. I daresay she is only one of those gypsies from the South. They are said to be wealthy, many of them, and even, when they like, to have a grand manner. The Thrums people had no doubt but that she was what she seemed to be."

"Ay, but what does she seem to be? Even that puzzles me. And then there is this mystery about her which she admits herself, though perhaps only to play with us."

"Perhaps," said Gavin, "she is only taking precautions against her discovery by the police. You must remember her part in the riots."

"Yes, but we never learned how she was able to play that part. Besides, there is no fear in her, or she would not have ventured back to Thrums. However, good luck attend you. But be wary. You saw how she kept her feet among her shalls and wills? Never trust a Scotch man or woman who does not come to grief among them."

The doctor took his seat in the dog-cart.

"And, Mr. Dishart," he called out, "that was all nonsense about the locket."

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